The New Criterion

September 2004

A monthly review *edited by Hilton Kramer*

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The New Criterion *September 2004*

Editor & Publisher *Hilton Kramer*
Managing Editor *Roger Kimball*
Associate Editor *James Panero*
Assistant Editor *Stefan Beck*
Poetry Editor *David Yezzi*
Office Manager *Cricket Farnsworth*
Assistant to the Editors *David Spelber*
Editorial Intern *Marcus Plieninger*

Publisher 1982–1994 *Samuel Lipman*

Contributors to this issue

Brooke Allen's *Artistic License* is forthcoming this month from Ivan R. Dee.

Stefan Beck is the assistant editor of *The New Criterion*.

James Bowman is a resident scholar at the Ethics and Public Policy Center.

Theodore Dalrymple is a doctor, an author, and a contributing editor of *City Journal*.

U. S. Dhuga is a doctoral candidate in classical philology at Columbia University.

Kevin Durkin's poems have appeared in *Poetry* and *The Yale Review*.

Marco Grassi is a private paintings conservator and dealer in New York City.

John Gross's most recent book is *A Double Thread* (Ivan R. Dee).

David Grosz is an Adjunct Professor of English at Brooklyn College.

Roger Kimball's latest book is *The Rape of the Masters: How Political Correctness Sabotages Art* (Encounter Books).

Tess Lewis is a translator and essayist who writes frequently about European literature.

William Logan's most recent book of poetry is *Macbeth in Venice* (Penguin).

William McGurn is the chief editorial writer for *The Wall Street Journal*.

Jay Nordlinger is the managing editor of *National Review*.

Eric Ormsby's latest selection of poems is *Daybreak at the Straits* (Zoo Press).

James Panero is the associate editor of *The New Criterion*.

Stephen Schwartz, a writer living in Washington, D.C., is the author of *The Two Faces of Islam: Saudi Fundamentalism and Its Role in Terrorism* (Doubleday).

Mark Steyn is the senior North American correspondent for Britain's Telegraph Group.

Karen Wilkin is writing introductory essays for the Stuart Davis catalogue raisonné, to be published by Yale University Press.

Keith Windschuttle's latest book is *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume One, Van Diemen's Land 1803–1847* (Macleay Press).

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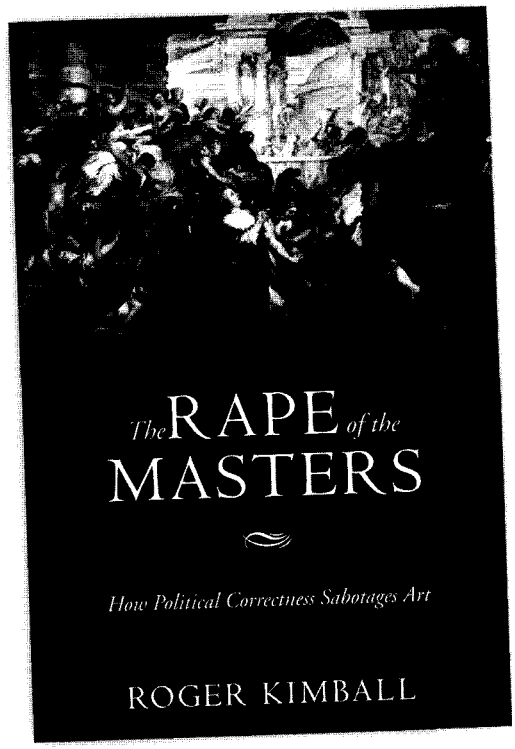

Colleges and universities used to teach art history to encourage connoisseurship and acquaint students with the riches of our artistic heritage. But, as Roger Kimball shows in this witty and provocative book, today's students are less likely to learn about the aesthetics of master works than be told, for instance, that Peter Paul Rubens's great painting "Drunken Silenus" is an allegory about rape; or that Jan van Eyck's masterful Arnolfini Portrait is about "middle-class deceptions... and the treatment of women;" or that Winslow Homer's "The Gulf Stream" is "a visual encoding of racism."

In *The Rape of the Masters: How Political Correctness Sabotages Art*, Kimball, a noted art critic himself, shows how academic art history is increasingly held hostage to radical cultural politics—feminism, cultural studies, post-colonial studies, the whole armory of academic anti-humanism. To make his point, Kimball shows how eight famous works of art—all of them reproduced in the book—have been interpreted by contemporary art historians to fit a radical ideological fantasy. Then, in his own exemplary analysis of these great works in which aesthetics, not politics, guides the discussion, Kimball shows how each of these paintings should properly be understood.

The Rape of the Masters exposes the charlatanry that fuels much academic art history and oozes into the art world generally. It also provides an engaging antidote to the tendentious, politically motivated assaults on our treasured sources of culture and civilization that take place in today's universities, museums, and art galleries.

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Notes & Comments: September 2004

"Exceptionally tasteful"?

When we look around the contemporary art world, especially at those precincts that are hailed as "cutting-edge" by the Art Establishment, we are often reminded of two passages from Robert Musil's great novel *The Man Without Qualities*, set in the months before the outbreak of World War I. The first is the passage where Musil describes how his hero, Ulrich, becomes a man "ohne Eigenschaften." It happened when he read somewhere about "a race horse of genius." If a *horse* can be a genius, what's left for a clever homo sapiens? The second passage describes the decadent cultural situation that gave rise to this bumpercrop of "genius."

> Sharp borderlines everywhere became blurred, and some new, indescribable capacity for entering into hitherto unheard-of relationships threw up new people and new ideas. . . . [T]he good was adulterated with a little too much of the bad, the truth with error, and the meaning with a little too much of the spirit of accommodation. There positively seemed to be certain proportions in which these elements had to be blended for maximum success in the world. A little admixture of *ersatz* was all that was wanted . . .

On a recent visit to Santa Fe, we stopped by that mountain community's "alternative" art center, SITE Santa Fe, and Musil was never far from our mind. We happened to be there soon after "Disparities & Deformations: Our Grotesque," the museum's fifth biennial exhibition, opened. Now, whenever the word "biennial" comes into contact with art these days, the result is invariably fatuous. Think of the Whitney's biennials; think of the biennials in São Paulo, in Venice: for as long as anyone can remember, they've been tired recycling centers where yesterday's trendy clichés are loudly celebrated by the Art Establishment in an orgy of self-congratulation.

Poor Santa Fe! They tried so desperately hard to be "with it." They even engaged Robert Storr, sometime curator at the Museum of Modern Art, to organize the exhibition: how's that for big-city credentials? But SITE Santa Fe hopped on the pseudo-avant-garde band wagon too late. "Disparities & Deformations" has all the old-timers: Sigmar Polke, Louise Bourgeois, Francesco Clemente, and Cindy Sherman. There are mildly pornographic cartoons by R. Crumb, a couple of truly icky pieces in beeswax and pubic hair by Robert Gober, and a video by Bruce Nauman called "S--- in Your Hat—Head on a Chair," which depicts a mime pretending to enact what the title suggests. Paul McCarthy weighs in with "Penis Hat," a very large, very juvenile object.

A couple of decades ago, exhibitions

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devoted to such stuff were irritating—all that scatological or politically rebarbative stuff crowding out the real art. The flaks in the press office and media kept telling us how "challenging," "transgressive," and "cutting-edge" it was, when in fact it had all been done a thousand times and the only thing it challenged was one's credulity that someone somewhere actually paid good money for this rubbish. How many times can you re-do Dalí or Duchamp before dulling the cutting-edge? The distinction between the "transgressive" and the "merely repellent" somehow got lost on the way to the bank.

It's been some years since exhibitions like "Disparities & Deformations" have ceased to inspire indignation. Now they inspire a mixture of boredom, pity, and contempt. Charles Stainback, the gallery's Executive Director, insists that "Disparities & Deformations" brings together "some of the most innovative art of our time." Maybe he really believes it, poor fellow. After all, the air in Santa Fe, at 7000 feet above sea level, *is* pretty thin. And Mr. Stainback has had plenty of encouragement. Consider the article by Michael Kimmelman, chief art critic for *The New York Times*, puffing the exhibition in our Paper of Record on August 6. Mr. Kimmelman, remember, is the man who called Matthew Barney—the "performance artist" best known for his profligate use of Vaseline—"the most important American artist of his generation." So it is the work of a moment for him to praise this "unusually cogent selection" and "exceptionally tasteful" installation of works "by so many good artists."

Take the "site specific" installation by Kim Jones, for example, which consisted of a few hundred rubber rats hanging from a 113-foot lattice in front of the museum. In the few feet between the lattice and the façade of the building were lined up five or six red-topped charcoal grills. They just *had* to be art. And sure enough: the cheerful young woman at the ticket counter informed us that at the opening gala, hundreds of hot-dogs were thrown on the hot grills to "simulate the smell of burning rats." So many good artists, such exceptional taste.

The *Times* wouldn't be the *Times* without a dollop of political correctness, which Mr. Kimmelman duly supplies when he speaks of Robert Storr's "deeper purpose" in "this convention season," i.e., to exhibit the "grotesque as a metaphor for constructive social change." Right. Your compost heap might as well be regarded as "a metaphor for constructive social change" (meaning, of course, an anti-Republican, anti-Bush crusade). Perhaps the lowest point of Mr. Kimmelman's valentine comes when he quotes a comment by John Ruskin about the grotesque—the implication being that Ruskin might somehow endorse what Mr. Storr has put over on the unsuspecting citizens of Santa Fe. It is pathetic, really, though the element of cynicism keeps anger at war with pity.

Meanwhile, in the ivory tower

One of the things middle-class parents worry most about is saving enough money to pay for Junior's education. We won't even mention how much it costs to go to private college because by the time you read this the figure will be out of date. It is reassuring, then, that college is a place of rigorous study where students steep themselves in the riches of the past in an environment conducive to building good character and responsible citizens. Consider the news report from the Associated Press about the recent vogue of "casino and gambling majors." No, we are not making this up:

> In the last five years or so, the courses and majors have cropped up at colleges including San Diego State University, Michigan State University, Tulane University's University College in New Orleans, and the University of

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> Massachusetts at Amherst. They join the pioneering University of Nevada at Las Vegas and Reno . . . .
>
> Courses range from the study of gambling laws around the country to operating on sovereign Indian land, plus biometrics and "facial recognition" for casino security. Other courses train students to be pit bosses, dealers and slot machine repairers.

It gives a whole new dimension of meaning to the old song from the *Carmina Burana*: "O Fortuna, velut luna." Note, by the way, that many state institutions are going in for "casino studies," which means that your tax dollars are spent making teenagers more avid and better informed gamblers. In *Pride and Prejudice*, the eldest Bennet daughter, the beautiful and mild Jane, is finally shocked when it transpires that Wickham has not only run off with her youngest sister but has left gambling debts behind him. "A gamester!," she cries in horror. But that was before the age of "casino studies" and, besides, who reads Jane Austen anymore?

Ave et vale

Attentive readers will note some staff changes at *The New Criterion*. We would like to bid farewell and thanks to Robert Richman, who stepped down as Poetry Editor this summer, and welcome David Yezzi and Stefan Beck. David will be familiar to many of you: he was Associate Editor of *The New Criterion* from 1994–1998 and has over the years contributed many essays and poems to our pages. While David will continue with his duties as director of the Unterberg Poetry Center at the 92nd Street Y, he is also, as of this month, joining us as Poetry Editor. Stefan Beck will also be familiar to many of you: he was our summer 2003 intern and has been a vibrant if long-distance presence at "Armavirumque," *The New Criterion*'s Weblog, this past year. (If you haven't been following our Weblog, take a look at www.newcriterion.com). We are pleased that Stefan is joining us full-time as Assistant Editor.

Donald Justice, 1925–2004

It is with great sadness that we report the passing of the poet Donald Justice, who died at seventy-eight on August 6 after a long illness. Justice was a quiet yet vibrant presence in the world of poetry, much respected for the excellence of his craft and the elegantly modulated passion of his poems. He was the recipient of many prizes and honors—the Pulitzer Prize in 1980, the Bollingen Prize in 1991, the Lannen Literary Award in 1996—but the fastidiousness of his verse assured that his celebrity remained select. Over the years, Justice published a few essays and many poems in *The New Criterion*. The first was "Children walking home from school through a good neighborhood," which appeared in October 1984, the second issue in which we published poems. The season is autumn, the time is after school:

> Someone's school notebook spills,
> And they bend down to gather up the loose pages.
> (Bright sweaters knotted at the waist; solemn expressions.)
> Not that they shrink or hold back from what may come,
> For now they all at once run to meet it, a little swirl of colors,
> Like the leaves already blazing and falling farther north.

Later in this issue, we run a poem by William Logan dedicated to Donald Justice. We plan to run a reflection on Justice's achievement by David Yezzi later this fall.

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Does shame have a future?

by Roger Kimball

No society can do without intolerance, indignation, and disgust.
—Patrick Devlin, *The Enforcement of Morals*

[A] liberal society has particular reasons to inhibit shame and protect its citizens from shaming.
—Martha C. Nussbaum, *Hiding from Humanity*

I heard thy voice in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself.
—Genesis, 3:10

In Masaccio's great fresco depicting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden (*ca.* 1426), the Angel of the Lord hovers, sword in hand, above and behind the First Couple. Adam strides forward, naked, his face buried in his hands. Eve, however, a look of wailing misery on her upturned face, covers her breasts and privates as she walks. She is ashamed of her nakedness and strives to conceal it.

I thought of Masaccio when I stumbled upon Martha Nussbaum's essay "Danger to Human Dignity: The Revival of Disgust and Shame in the Law," which appeared last month in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. How Nussbaum would disapprove of Eve!, I thought. For Martha Nussbaum—a classicist who is currently the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics in the Philosophy Department, Law School, and Divinity School at the University of Chicago—does not approve of shame. She is not too keen about disgust, either. Both emotions, she thinks, impede "the moral progress of society." And here we have Eve, ashamed of her body, modestly shielding her sex from view: how very unprogressive.

"Danger to Human Dignity" is an oddly vertiginous work, as is the new book from which it is drawn, *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*.[1] (It is appropriate that the book should feature on its cover a fleshy, unpleasant nude by Otto Dix: how different it is—morally as well as aesthetically—from Masaccio's Eve!) Professor Nussbaum begins "Danger to Human Dignity" with the following show-stopper: "The law, most of us would agree, should be society's protection against prejudice." Really? I thought "most of us would agree" that the law ought to be society's protection against *crime*. But perhaps Professor Nussbaum thinks that prejudice is itself a crime—though surely not *all* prejudice. Edmund Burke said that prejudice "renders a man's virtue his habit." He meant that if we have a predisposition—a prejudice—toward the right things, they more easily become second nature. Surely Professor Nussbaum would not wish the law to protect us from that sort of prejudice. And it must be said that she herself is clearly prejudiced against anything she labels "conservative." I doubt

1 *Hiding from Humanity: Disgust, Shame, and the Law*, by Martha C. Nussbaum; Princeton University Press, 413 pages, $29.95.

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that she believes that the law should be society's protection against prejudice directed at conservatives.

Well, let's leave prejudice to one side. The ostensible burden of both these works, the essay and the book, is to warn readers about the "remarkable revival" of shame and disgust in our society, especially as they impinge upon the law. Now when I read that, I thought "Nussbaum, on top of everything else, must be a student of Stephen Potter." For anyone as intelligent as she could not really believe that shame and disgust are enjoying a renaissance in our culture. She must be employing a variation of a gambit Potter describes in his book *Lifemanship*, "Going One Better." It works like this. First you find out the quality for which an author is most famous, then you blame him for not having enough of it. An example from *Lifemanship*: "The one thing that was lacking, of course, from D. H. Lawrence's novels, was the consciousness of sexual relationship, the male and female element in life." Look around at our society: flip on the television; saunter down to your local newsstand; visit a local theater or museum; inspect the nose rings, the tongue or eyebrow or nipple studs that are so popular with the young and not-so-young today. One thing indisputably missing in our society is anything like a traditional sense of shame or disgust. So how clever of Professor Nussbaum to devote an entire book to the malignant presence of something that has all but disappeared.

Professor Nussbaum is particularly exercised by the sentences, handed down by various courts, which involve some public declaration of the perpetrator's wrongdoing. A child molester, for example, is required to post a sign on his property warning children to stay away. Another chap, convicted of larceny, is required to wear a shirt with the advice: "I am on felony probation for theft." A drunk driver is made to sport a bumper sticker advertising the fact of his infraction to other motorists.

Professor Nussbaum approvingly quotes a spokesman from the American Civil Liberties Union who angrily objects to such punishments: "Gratuitous humiliation of the individual serves no social purpose at all . . . [a]nd there's been no research to suggest it's been effective in reducing crime." To which one might reply that the humiliation was not "gratuitous" but, on the contrary, was meted out in response to a criminal violation. And as for the "research," it doesn't take much to tell you that, having been duly put on notice, the neighbors of that convicted child molester will keep a wary eye out for him, thus reducing the chance of a repeat performance. Likewise, the shopkeeper who espies the banner-wearing thief enter his store is sure to watch the till, once again reducing the chance that the crime will be repeated.

But Professor Nussbaum doesn't confine herself to mere pragmatic issues, such as whether a given policy in fact reduces crime. Her objection is more fundamental. "Shaming penalties," she notes, "encourage the stigmatization of offenders, asking us to view them as shameful." Er, yes: they would have that effect, wouldn't they? *Hiding from Humanity* is full of such near tautologies. You do something bad, something, in fact, that is shameful. The legal punishment calls attention to your bad, your shameful, action, partly in order to encourage you to reflect on your fault, partly to alert others to it. Is that a bad thing?

Professor Nussbaum brandishes the verb "stigmatize" early and often in this book. She doesn't approve of stigmatizing people. Originally, a stigma was a mark burned into the skin of a criminal or slave. It has acquired an additional meaning: "A mark or token of infamy, disgrace, or reproach," as my dictionary puts it. Professor Nussbaum several times raises the specter of unfairly stigmatizing innocent people or groups of people. She quotes A. Hitler on the Jews, for example. As you'd expect, he said some very unpleasant things that were definitely intended to stigmatize the Jewish people. But how about Joe, the convicted child molester, who moves in next door? A thoughtful judge

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has ordered him to post a sign on his front lawn advertising his crime. That sign is indeed "A mark or token of infamy, disgrace, or reproach," and you can bet that it's one for which the mothers in the neighborhood are grateful. Which brings us to something that gets lost in Professor Nussbaum's discussion: the distinction between unfairly stigmatizing an innocent person or group of people and stigmatizing someone or some group because they deserve a mark or token of infamy, disgrace, or reproach. *Of course* one wishes to avoid the former. Does that mean that we should in principle forswear the latter?

In any event, Professor Nussbaum has a deeper objection to penalties that shame a criminal. She thinks that calling attention to Joe's penchant for sexually molesting little girls or boys is incompatible with the ideals of "human dignity and the equal worth of persons." That's another phrase Professor Nussbaum deploys regularly. She tells us, toward the beginning of her book, that her guiding motivation is to "construct a public myth of equal humanity, to substitute for other pernicious myths that have long guided us." That sounds nice. Why not toss out all those "pernicious myths" that have guided humanity until fifteen minutes ago and sign on to the one that says "human dignity" and "equality"?

Professor Nussbaum speaks of the "equal worth of persons." What do you suppose she means? In America, all citizens are meant to enjoy equality before the law. The figure of justice is often portrayed blindfolded because the scales she carries are meant to operate dispassionately, without the ballast of interest or parti-pris. That is one sort of equality. Then there is what the philosopher Harvey Mansfield called "the self-evident half-truth that all men are created equal." It's only a half-truth because, except for the special case of our status as legal actors, nothing could be more obvious than the gross inequality of men. As the journalist William Henry put it in his book *In Defense of Elitism* (1994),

> the simple fact [is] that some people are better than others—smarter, harder working, more learned, more productive, harder to replace. Some ideas are better than others, some values more enduring, some works of art more universal. Some cultures, though we dare not say it, are more accomplished than others and therefore more worthy of study.

Something similar can be said about "human dignity." Professor Nussbaum finds a "deep tension" between the view that "law should shame malefactors and the view that law should protect citizens from insults to their dignity." Let's leave the question of whether the law really should concern itself with "insults" to a citizen's dignity. Mightn't it be argued that by calling attention to a criminal violation of human dignity the law *reinforces* the ideal of human dignity?

In any event, all these cases concern the outer scaffolding of Professor Nussbaum's argument. The inner core of her book is part of a revisionist morality, the emotional weather of which is summed up in a section that appears towards the end of her book: "The Case Against Disgust and Shame."

As Professor Nussbaum acknowledges, shame and its more visceral cousin, disgust, are semantically amphibious emotions. They are moral as well as physical creatures, depending as much upon an idea of the good as upon physical revulsion. Shame is deeply bound up with modesty, another moral sentiment that inscribes itself in immediate physical reaction. Similarly, disgust is the body's fire alarm for the noxious, but not merely the physically noxious. As William Ian Miller puts it in his book *The Anatomy of Disgust* (1997), disgust, although inculcated in toddlerhood, is "above all . . . a moral and a social sentiment." Disgust highlights the good by violently excluding its opposite. Consequently, Miller argues, "contempt and disgust have their necessary role to play in a good, but not perfect, social order." Utopia, having excluded evil, would have no call for disgust. As Miller notes, these observations are hardly new: "The entire Latin Christian discourse of sin

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depended on the conceptualization of sin and hell as raising excremental stenches and loathsome prospects."

Professor Nussbaum wants us to get beyond all this. She acknowledges "the person who is utterly shame-free is not a good friend, lover, or citizen," but she wants to privatize shame, as it were, to disenfranchise it from any role in public life. Similarly, Professor Nussbaum acknowledges that disgust may have played "a valuable role in our evolution"—making us recoil from various toxic elements in our environment; she even admits that it may continue to be a valuable guide in daily life. But because the "thought-content" of disgust is "typically unreasonable, embodying magical ideas of contamination, and impossible aspirations to purity, immortality, and nonanimality," disgust should "never be the primary basis for rendering an act criminal, and should not play either an aggravating or a mitigating role in the criminal law where it currently does."

Another way of putting this is to say that Professor Nussbaum wishes completely to emancipate law from the idea of sin. From a traditional point of view, of course, the law is seen as being rooted in a moral vision, which includes a recognition of sin. As the British jurist Patrick Devlin noted in *The Enforcement of Morals* (1965), "the complete separation of crime from sin . . . would not be good for the moral law and might be disastrous for the criminal." Why? Because without the idea of sin, moral life would be an empty calculus of pain and pleasure. "What makes a society of any sort," Lord Devlin noted, "is a community of ideas, not only political ideas but also ideas about the way its members should behave and govern their lives; these latter ideas are its morals."

Sin—like disgust, like shame—is such an *irrational* idea, so hard to get hold of "theoretically." Professor Nussbaum finds disgust "perplexing in theory": "the theoretical literature," she says, reveals "considerable debate about whether shame and disgust ought to play the roles they currently play" in the moral and legal economy of life. ("That's all very well in practice," says the economist in the old joke, "but how does it work out in theory?") "To appeal to disgust," Professor Nussbaum concludes, "seems to be just to say 'I don't like that,' and stamp one's foot. No reasons are advanced that would make debate about such laws a real piece of public persuasion."

Professor Nussbaum is certainly right that feelings of disgust, like feelings of shame, are extra- if not irrational: we don't *argue* ourselves into disgust or shame: we feel it immediately. Professor Nussbaum is deeply suspicious of those feelings. She sharply criticizes the physician-philosopher Leon Kass for advocating the "wisdom of repugnance"—the wisdom of disgust and revulsion—because our disgust might be misplaced. She is even more severe about Lord Devlin, who argued that "for the difficult choice between a number of rational conclusions the ordinary man has to rely upon a 'feeling' for the right answer. Reasoning will get him nowhere."

A good conservative, Lord Devlin was a minimalist when it came to the law's province. "In any new matter of morals," he argued, "the law should be slow to act." Advocating "toleration of the maximum individual freedom that is consistent with the integrity of society," he noted that "the law is concerned with the minimum and not with the maximum": "the criminal law is not a statement of how people ought to behave; it is a statement of what will happen to them if they do not behave." At the same time, Lord Devlin recognized that "not everything is to be tolerated. No society can do without intolerance, indignation, and disgust."

> Every moral judgement, unless it claims a divine source, is simply a feeling that no right-minded man could behave in any other way without admitting he was wrong. It is the power of common sense and not the power of reason that is behind the judgements of society.

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Professor Nussbaum is very impatient with the "power of common sense." It is so often insufficiently enlightened, insufficiently progressive, insufficiently in agreement with the opinions of people like Martha Nussbaum. Lord Devlin appealed to the moral feeling of the ordinary man, "the man in the Clapham omnibus." Professor Nussbaum doubts "whether the disgust of the 'average' man would ever be a reliable test for what might be legally regulable."

So maybe many of the things that the inherited moral wisdom of millennia have taught us to find disgusting—and to which society has responded with various legal prohibitions—need to be reevaluated? What do you think? Take necrophilia. Professor Nussbaum finds this a thorny problem. Who, after all, is harmed in the transaction? Professor Nussbaum wonders "whether necrophilia ought, in fact, to be illegal." She acknowledges that there is "something unpleasant" about a person who rapes a corpse, but it is "unclear" to her whether such conduct should be "criminal." Possibly, since a corpse is generally the property of its family, there should be "some criminal penalties" where "property violations" are involved, but otherwise not.

Professor Nussbaum describes her intellectual-political pedigree as "less Millian than Whitmanesque." That may be right. I think, for example, of "Song of Myself," which has many Nussbaumian touches. Nussbaum: "[W]e wash our bodies, seek privacy for urination and defecation, cleanse ourselves of offending odors with toothbrush and mouthwash, sniff our armpits when nobody is looking, check in the mirror to make sure that no conspicuous snot is caught in our nose-hairs." Whitman: "The scent of these arm-pits is aroma finer than prayer,/ This head is more than churches or bibles or creeds./ . . . I dote on myself . . . . there is that lot of me, and all so luscious . . .").

But if there is a lot of Whitman blowing through Professor Nussbaum's book, there is also a good deal of Mill. I am thinking especially of the Mill of *On Liberty*, the Mill who advocated "new and original experiments in living" and argued that the *sole* justification society had for interfering with an individual "in the way of compulsion and control"—whether by "physical force in the form of legal penalties or the moral coercion of public opinion"—was "self-protection." If the individual is not harming others, then (says Mill) we have to leave him alone: "His own good, either physical or moral, is not a sufficient warrant" for interference. Mill's libertarian doctrine is our modern gospel. Professor Nussbaum is part of a large choir singing its praises.

But the popularity of Mill's doctrine says nothing about its cogency. As James Fitzjames Stephen pointed out in *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity* (1873), Mill's teaching would "condemn every existing system of morals."

> Strenuously preach and rigorously practise the doctrine that our neighbor's private character is nothing to us, and the number of unfavorable judgments formed, and therefore the number of inconveniences inflicted by them can be reduced as much as we please, and the province of liberty can be enlarged in corresponding ratio. Does any reasonable man wish for this? Could anyone desire gross licentiousness, monstrous extravagance, ridiculous vanity, or the like, to be unnoticed, or, being known, to inflict no inconveniences which can possibly be avoided?

As Stephen dryly observes, "the custom of looking upon certain courses of conduct with aversion is the essence of morality." But it is part of Professor Nussbaum's brief—as, in a way, it was of Mill's—to encourage us to dispense with moral aversion, of which shame and disgust are prominent allotropes.

One of the oddest features of *Hiding from Humanity* is Professor Nussbaum's recurring argument that the emotions of shame and disgust encourage us to ignore or discount our mortality, our incompleteness, our animality. No doubt Professor Nussbaum has managed to embrace her own animality without the benefit of shame or

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disgust. But for most of us, the emotions of shame and disgust are vivid reminders of our status as imperfect creatures, fragile, animal, and therefore mortal.

This is something embodied the world over in the idea of taboo, a concept with deep connections to the ideas of shame and disgust. These are insights we arrive at not by ratiocination but by feeling. As the philosopher Leszek Kolakowski writes, "We do not assent to our moral beliefs by admitting 'this is true,' but by feeling guilty if we fail to comply with them." What we are dealing with, he points out, is not an intellectual performance but "an act of questioning one's own status in the cosmic order, . . . an anxiety following a transgression *not of a law* but of a *taboo*." Professor Nussbaum wants us to "discard the grandiose demands for omnipotence and completeness that have been at the heart of so much human misery." Good idea! But shame and disgust are accomplices, not impediments, to that attack on hubris.

Hiding from Humanity is not only a polemic against the emotions of shame and disgust. It is also a political position paper. Professor Nussbaum is such a ferocious opponent of shame and disgust because she is such a passionate proponent of many things that shame and disgust recoil from. It is ironical that in a book which is partly an attack on "the grandiose" Professor Nussbaum should harbor such a grandiose agenda for social change. From public nudity to poverty, the global AIDS crisis, and homosexual marriage, Professor Nussbaum has embraced the entire menu of politically correct causes. Poverty, she says, is "one of the most stigmatized life-conditions, in all societies." Therefore it must be removed. And not just poverty: we must also supply items that are "part of the social definition of a decent living-standard," e.g., "a personal computer." AIDS is "a major cause of stigmatized lives." Something must be done!

Professor Nussbaum is one of those intellectuals whose intoxication with the thought of her own virtue is equalled only by her contempt for the opinions of the ordinary people whose lives she pretends to anguish over. Even without the inducement of the arguments she advances, her conviction of moral superiority would have led her to jettison shame as an impediment to "the moral progress of society." One saw this at work a decade ago when she was called upon to give expert testimony in *Evans v. Romer*, which challenged a state constitutional amendment in Colorado that prohibited any official body from adopting a law or policy that grants homosexuals "minority status, quota preferences, protected status or claim of discrimination." As the philosopher John Finnis showed in an article for *Academic Questions*, Professor Nussbaum, by deliberately misrepresenting the meaning of Greek words and the work of other scholars, engaged in "wholesale abuse of her scholarly authority and attainments." Among other things, she went back to a nineteenth-century edition of the standard Greek-English lexicon because it did not include a morally opprobrious definition of a contested Greek term. She took the trouble to white-out the name of a contributor to the later edition of the lexicon that the lawyers, unaware of her subterfuge, had supplied in the footnotes of a court document. Challenged about this, she claimed that she was simply correcting a clerical error because the earlier edition was "more reliable on authors of the classical period" than later editions. I asked a former Regius Professor of Greek about that and it took him about five minutes to stop laughing. It's clear that Professor Nussbaum doesn't believe it either, since it has been shown that her own work regularly relies on later editions.

It is a curious quirk of language that "shameless" entails "shameful"—that is, being without shame is something to be ashamed of. This is not, I suspect, something that much troubles the Ernst Freund Distinguished Service Professor of Law and Ethics in the Philosophy Department, Law School, and Divinity School at the University of Chicago. But the rest of us might regard a shameless life the real hiding from humanity.

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The unauthorized Anthony Powell

by Brooke Allen

The question of "authorized" versus "unauthorized" biographies has always been a troubled one. Authorized lives, on the one hand, tend to be too polite, too considerate of the feelings of the subject and his family—necessarily so since these people usually control access to vital materials and memories, so that their goodwill becomes essential for the success of the project. Unauthorized biographies, on the other hand, are often either scurrilous (authorization being withheld on that very account), or, if sympathetic, badly weakened by the author's lack of access to sources.

Michael Barber's new life of Anthony Powell falls into the latter category.[1] The Powell family (Powell himself died in 2000, at the age of 94) had chosen Hilary Spurling, the author of well-regarded lives of Paul Scott and Ivy Compton-Burnett, as the authorized biographer. But Barber, notable for his highly entertaining book on the disreputable novelist Simon Raven, refused to acknowledge rejection and pressed ahead with his own Powell biography, which was published recently in England and is now appearing here.

The bad news: not only did Powell's family and friends withhold help from Barber, they seem even to have tried to hinder him: never have I read a biography, and this is particularly notable in a subject who died only recently, that used fewer primary sources. The book contains no unpublished material, nothing that cannot be found in Powell's own four volumes of memoirs (collected under the title *To Keep the Ball Rolling*), his three volumes of *Journals*, or the published memoirs and journals of his friends and contemporaries. Nor will the reader find any original or even particularly thoughtful approaches to Powell's work; Barber is less interested in criticism than in providing a *clef* to Powell's *romans*, though even in this department he presents us with very few surprises, for *To Keep the Ball Rolling* already gave all the clues we really need to the various characters that inspired *A Dance to the Music of Time*.

The good news: the book is extremely readable. Barber, with his Rabelaisian humor and his characteristic style, brisk almost to the point of crudeness, did a brilliant job with the equally crude and Rabelaisian Simon Raven, but he might have been a very bad mismatch for the fastidious—in the subject's own words, "frightfully buttoned up"—Powell. Oddly, this has not proved to be the case, and at times Barber's plain talking, set against Powell's coy elusiveness, has a bracing effect. British reviewers (including Spurling herself in Powell's own longtime venue, the *Telegraph*) expressed pained disgust at Barber's use of vulgarisms, specifically "up your arse," but it should be noted that David Pennistone, one of the few entirely charming and sympathetic charac-

1 *Anthony Powell: A Life*, by Michael Barber; Duckworth Overlook Press, 338 pages, $29.95.

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ters in *A Dance to the Music of Time*, uses the very same phrase. Powell could have a tendency to seem stuffy; Barber's breeziness undercuts this slight pomposity without ever tainting his sympathy for the man and his work.

A case in point is Powell's interest in genealogy, which he stuffed into his memoirs, tracing his family back to South Wales in the fifth century A.D. Barber would seem to be of the opinion that a taste for genealogy, like a taste for pornography, is best enjoyed in private, and he refuses to indulge Powell's little hobby in his own narrative.

Such interests—Powell claimed that *Debrett's* was his favorite bedside reading—and the often Blimpish, high Tory attitudes expressed in the *Journals*, have not helped Powell's posthumous reputation, and as we move into a century so vastly at odds, socially and technologically, with the world he wrote about, he is becoming marginalized as the specialized taste of the old-fashioned, the Tory, the aesthetically conservative. John Carey, reviewing the Barber book in London's *Sunday Times*, brutally lambasted Powell as a man with "no ideas," a second-rate Evelyn Waugh, a snob "incapable of conveying deep feeling" who "knew about only a tiny upper stratum of English society." This is so patently wrong that it deserves a thorough rebuttal, more thorough even than Barber gives us.

A snob? First of all, even if the charge were true, we must remember that snobbery has never proved a fatal handicap either to good writing or deep feeling. Proust, Henry James, Fitzgerald were all snobs of the deepest dye. But there is really nothing of the snob in Powell's narrative consciousness or in his treatment of his characters. The most deeply sympathetic characters in *Dance*, like Hugh Moreland and X. Trapnel, come from the middle classes; those from still lower strata, like Ted Jeavons, or Rowland Gwatkin, the idealistic Welsh bank-clerk-turned-wartime-officer, possess as much dignity and poignancy as anyone in the sequence. Kenneth Widmerpool's odiousness derives from his character, not his background: his unexalted origins (his father dealt in liquid manure) are structurally necessary to accentuate his rise to power, especially insofar as it serves as a foil to Charles Stringham's rapid social descent. In any case, Stringham's charm and aristocratic lustre guarantee neither strength nor virtue; neither, in the end, does his very real wit. The seeds of his self-destruction are evident from the very first of the sequence's twelve volumes. And as a final argument against seeing Powell as a snob, here is one of his characters, Sir Gavin Walpole-Wilson: a *true* snob. No one who could write this passage could be a snob, at least not in the simple sense of the word:

> "As a matter of fact, the Wilsons are, if anything, an older family than the Walpoles—well, perhaps not that, but at least as old," he used to say. "I expect you have heard of Beau Wilson, a young gentleman who spent a lot of money in the reign of William and Mary, and was killed in a duel. I have reason to suppose he was one of our lot. And then there was a Master of the Mint a bit earlier. The double-barrel, which I greatly regret, and would discard if I could, without putting myself and my own kith and kin to a great deal of inconvenience, was the work of a great-uncle—a most consequential ass, between you and me, and a bit of a snob, I'm afraid—and has really no basis whatever, beyond the surname of a remote ancestor in the female line."

The criticism that Powell dealt with "only a tiny upper stratum of English society" is absurd. One of the most successful elements of *Dance* is the movement of the narrator, Nicholas Jenkins, beyond that tiny upper stratum—Eton, Oxford (both of which are unnamed but obvious), and the stiflingly ingrown circuit of London debutante balls—into the wider world of bohemia and the arts, and the way these worlds unexpectedly interact. The turning point comes at Milly Andriadis's high bohemian party in *A Buyer's Market*, the first such gathering Jenkins has attended. Upon arrival he is embarrassed to be seen in the *louche* company of Mr. Deacon and Gypsy Jones, but he soon discovers, to

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his surprise, that they blend quite unobtrusively into the background. It was the beginning of a new order particular to the Twenties, when "it was possible," Powell later wrote, "for the most unlikely people to meet each other in a manner which today [1951] would be, to say the least, unexpected."

What really needs to happen, but probably never will in today's ruthlessly leveling society, is for Powell's critics to follow the advice he himself doled out to those of Evelyn Waugh: to stop talking about what a snob he was and start talking about how good the writing was. And speaking of Waugh, to call Powell a lesser Waugh makes no sense at all. They were of the same generation and used a similar cast of characters, but there the resemblance ends; Waugh's wild, powerful farce was miles away from Powell's nuanced irony. As Alan Pryce-Jones commented,

> As a young novelist, Anthony Powell had a stroke of bad luck: he happened to be just two years younger than Evelyn Waugh, so that his own *Afternoon Men* came into a world already conditioned by *Decline and Fall* and *Vile Bodies*. This . . . concealed from the public that a very unusual talent, slow to ripen, but capable of astonishing extension and modulation, had made its first appearance.

Like Waugh, Powell was a political conservative in a generation that favored the Left, but there is no need to be a Tory in order to enjoy their work: I myself am proof of that. Recently Brian Urquhart, a frequent contributor to the *New York Review of Books*, long-serving U.N. official of liberal politics, and an Englishman who is old enough to have moved in the same social circles as Powell, gave it as his opinion that Powell might well prove to be the very best writer of his generation, possibly better, because less easily datable, than Waugh. Others, equally unsympathetic to the political Right, share this opinion. George Orwell himself named Powell as "the only Tory I have ever liked."

One cannot be a great writer or even a passable one without ideas, and the charge the Powell lacks ideas is incomprehensible. The whole of *A Dance to the Music of Time* can be seen as the illustration of an idea, frequently articulated by Powell's friend Malcolm Muggeridge, that life amounts to a titanic struggle between the Will and the Imagination.

In Widmerpool, the abstract concept of Will takes an appropriately grotesque form, and his career illustrates the fact that while those who live by the Will profit from their single-mindedness with worldly honors, the contest, on some level, can never end: Widmerpool expires, fittingly enough, while undergoing the same sort of joyless, expiatory run that Jenkins recalls from their schooldays, when the plodding fellow seemed to be forever practicing for teams for which he would never be chosen and races he would never win.

Those who live by the Imagination tend to forego—at least during their lifetimes—the honors and prizes that a Widmerpool, or a Sir Magnus Donners, scoops up; it is the price they pay for the luxury of having an Imagination and living inside it. Moreland's musical genius makes him literally unfit for the struggle of what Jenkins thinks of as "the Acceptance World," and the same is true of the writer X. Trapnel, who can barely scrape up the price of a drink but who becomes, after his death, the subject of bitter academic turf wars. Stringham, who lives by the Imagination but is sustained by no corresponding artistic talent, undergoes an abject life but dies (unlike Widmerpool and the other power-brokers) with dignity and even a species of heroism. His alcoholism is key: in Powell's books, as Barber points out, drinkers (and by extension Trapnel, a doper) self-destruct but do not impose on others; it is the abstemious control-freaks, like Widmerpool, Sillery, and Sir Magnus Donners, who are really dangerous.

Not all men of the Imagination are artists, and not all men of the Will are businessmen. The litterateurs J. G. Quiggin and Mark Members, for instance, are more driven by Will than Imagination, and their careers are

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accordingly successful. The trajectory of Members (loosely based on Peter Quennell) is characteristic. It is evident even on our first glimpse of him, as a precocious Oxford poet in *A Question of Upbringing*, that Members is embarked on building a reputation rather than a body of work: he emphasizes his boyishness with a floppy fringe and arranges himself in picturesque attitudes.

> Just as Quiggin had dealt with the last crumb, Members rose suddenly from the sofa and cast himself, with a startling bump, almost full length on the floor in front of the fireplace: exchanging in this manner his Boyhood-of-Raleigh posture for that of the Dying Gladiator. Sillery, whose back was turned, started violently, and Members pleaded: "You don't mind, Sillers? I always lie on the floor."

Nearly half a century later he has become the old man one might have predicted. From *Hearing Secret Harmonies*: "Members, his white hair worn long, face pale and lined, had returned to the Romantic Movement overtones of undergraduate days. His air was that of an eighteenth-century sage too highminded to wear a wig—Blake, Benjamin Franklin, one of the Encyclopaedists—suitable image for a figure of his eminence in the cultural world." His collected poems—from the early "Iron Aspidistra" to the late "H-Bomb Eclogue"—have just been published, and, as we can see from their titles, they encapsulate the history of literary fashion between 1930 and 1970. He has, in other words, morphed completely into the self-important, fashion-driven "man of letters" exemplified by his former employer St. John Clarke, a hoary Edwardian relic, author of the novels *Fields of Amaranth* and *Match Me Such Marvel*, who loomed large during Members's and Jenkins's younger days and whom the young Members manipulated and patronized.

In Powell's scheme there is, I think, a third category that Michael Barber has missed: the person who lives not by the Imagination or the Will but by the senses. The prototype here is Peter Templer, who even as a boy found "no truth except in tangible things." Templer, who on his father's advice skips university to go directly into business, quickly coarsens in the constant company of men like the crude Bob Duport, but Templer's downfall is not money or power—he is not, in fact, ambitious—but women. When Sir Magnus Donners casts him in the role of Lust in the Seven Deadly Sins pageant at Stourwater, he is only stating the obvious. What is interesting, and the irony of situation is not lost on Jenkins, is that while Templer was the first of his contemporaries to be comfortable with women, losing his virginity to a London tart while still a schoolboy and later becoming a compulsive and highly successful womanizer, both of his marriages are disastrous and he dies, in wartime, in a quixotic and failed quest for a woman's love. Templer reaps none of the rewards either of the Will or the Imagination; as a personification of Lust he gets the worst of both worlds, and his life, one feels, has been wasted. With all this in mind, it can be seen that the first chapter of *Dance* sets up the entire scheme of the novel sequence, contrasting the Will (Widmerpool), the Imagination (Stringham), and the Senses (Templer) as they begin their life's journey.

There are few factual surprises in Barber's book. The details of Powell's life are, as might be expected, very substantially the same as Nick Jenkins's. What one might have hoped was for a bit more of the self-effacing Powell to be exposed to our view, but this doesn't happen. Jenkins was not the hero of *Dance*, and Powell was not the hero of his memoirs; he *is* the hero of the Barber biography, but the picture we get of him is always refracted. In the absence of more personal material, in fact, Barber has sometimes had to resort to deducing Powell's thoughts and feelings from Jenkins's—a dangerous business. This only serves to prove the theory memorably formulated in *Hearing Secret Harmonies* by X. Trapnel (who, though based on Julian Maclaren-Ross, often serves as a mouthpiece for

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Powell), that there is more truth in fiction than in biography:

> "People think that because a novel's invented, it isn't true. Exactly the reverse is the case. Because a novel's invented, it is true. Biography and memoirs can never be wholly true, since they can't include every conceivable circumstance of what happened. The novel can do that. The novelist himself lays it down. His decision is binding. The biographer, even at his highest and best, can be only tentative, empirical. The autobiographer, for his part, is imprisoned in his own egotism."

Or, to quote Sir Thomas Browne, "Some Truths seem almost Falsehoods and Some Falsehoods almost Truths"—"in a sense the justification," Powell remarked in his memoirs, "of all novel writing."

Jenkins is depicted primarily in negative terms. Philip Mason described him as "the almost invisible man, the universal unobtrusive confidant and observer." Mason, a longtime friend of Powell's, also said that Powell himself played that role to perfection, even as an undergraduate. James Michie, Powell's editor at Heinemann's, gives a complementary view of the subject later in life: "Like most Etonians he had superb manners, to which was added great charm and an endearing smile. You were so at ease with him that you said much more than you'd intended, particularly about something like sex. At the same time, he managed to be very oblique about himself." Oblique but not opaque; Muggeridge claimed that "for those that have eyes to see, the life story and character of Powell is unfolded with extraordinary vividness in Nicholas's narration."

Jenkins is bland; dry; prickly, but unwilling to expose himself enough to admit to taking offense; snobbish, but in the intellectual rather than the social sense. From *A Buyer's Market*:

> "Why are you so stuck up?" she [Gypsy Jones] asked, truculently.
>
> "I'm just made that way."
>
> "You ought to fight it."
>
> "I can't see why."

And of course he is not only intellectually judgmental but morally so as well. There is a telling throwaway line, for example, when Hugh Moreland begins secretly carrying on with Priscilla Tolland while "happily" married to Matilda Wilson: "All three persons fell in my estimation," Jenkins remarks in *Casanova's Chinese Restaurant*. Moreland and Priscilla, yes, all right, but why the apparently innocent Matilda? What does this tell us about Jenkins?

The character-sketch given by Mrs. Erdleigh, as she reads Jenkins' cards, can be taken as true, for while mysticism in *Dance* is in itself always suspect, information imparted by self-styled psychics like Mrs. Erdleigh, Scorpio Murtlock, or Dr. Trelawney always has meaning within the context of the fiction. From *The Acceptance World*:

> "You are thought cold, but you possess deep affections, sometimes for people worthless in themselves. Often you are at odds with those who might help you. You like women, and they like you, but you often find the company of men more amusing. You expect too much, and yet you are also too resigned. You must try to understand life. . . . People can only be themselves. . . . If they possessed the qualities you desire in them, they would be different people. . . . You must make a greater effort in life."

None of this makes Jenkins (or Powell) sound a particularly likeable character, but in fact he is oddly appealing: quick to ridicule others, he just as easily sees the funny side of himself. Early in life, he reflects ruefully on his mediocre sexual score-sheet:

> [M]y interest in love was keen enough, but the thing itself seemed not particularly simple to come by. In that direction, other people appeared more easily satisfied than myself. That at least was how it seemed to me. And yet, in spite of some show of picking and choosing, my experiences, on subsequent examination,

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> were certainly no more admirable than those to which neither Templer nor Barnby, for example, would have given a second thought; they were merely fewer in number.

His discomfiture is equally comical some years later when he discovers that his lover Jean Duport has slept with the repulsive Jimmy Stripling and was having a secret affair with the equally disgusting Jimmy Brent at the same time that she was romantically involved with Jenkins. Duport, Stripling, Brent: if these are the kind of men Jean finds attractive, Jenkins concludes, he had better take a very good look at himself.

In the background is always the question, brought up by the superb General Conyers, of the "personal myth." "The General, speaking one felt with authority, always insisted that, if you bring off adequate preservation of your personal myth, nothing much else in life matters. It is not what happens to people that is significant, but what they think happens to them." Stringham, one feels, accepts his fate as part of his rather dark personal myth; General Conyers accepts the various triumphs of his life on the same level. Jenkins's personal myth is more difficult to grasp, but his role as observer and his role as artist are certainly closely linked in its construction.

That he himself might be an artist dawned on Powell only slowly. The son of an army officer, like Jenkins, he grew up within a military culture ("Stonedene," the house near Aldershot where he lived as a child, is an exact replica of "Stonehurst" in *The Kindly Ones*, where the Jenkins and Conyers families learn of the assassination at Sarajevo). As a child he planned a military career. At Eton, however, he joined the Eton Society of the Arts, whose membership at that time included Henry Green, Harold Acton, and Robert Byron, and began to conceive of a life as some sort of artist, possibly a painter.

Powell was not an outstanding success in any field until mid-life. At Eton he was in Goodhart's, the "worst" house; at Oxford, in spite of hard work, he got only a third. His long apprenticeship at Gerald Duckworth & Co. Ltd., which was supposed to end with his father putting up money for a partnership, eventually came to nothing. His first novel, *Afternoon Men*, was promising, but it was killed by the Depression, which dated its cast of jaded Bright Young Things rather badly. Subsequent novels—*Venusberg*, *From A View to a Death*, *Agents and Patients*—were pleasant but lightweight. *What's Become of Waring*, a somewhat larger undertaking, was published in 1939 but quickly forgotten in the countdown to war. Powell's career as an overaged, underqualified officer in World War II was every bit as unglamorous as Jenkins's, which reflects it fairly faithfully. (One interesting fact, however: for a short time Powell held the Military Assistant Secretary post at the Cabinet Office that he gives to Widmerpool in *The Military Philosophers*: Powell, unlike the careerist Widmerpool, failed at this job and was thrown out after a mere nine weeks.)

After the war Powell's career as a reviewer and literary editor flourished. He served as fiction reviews editor and chief novel reviewer for the *Times Literary Supplement*, had a fortnightly column in the *Daily Telegraph* for thirty years, and was the literary editor of *Punch* during Malcolm Muggeridge's tenure, in which post he was instrumental in adjusting the tone of the magazine, more or less unchanged since Thackeray's day: the cartoonist Mark Boxer, one of Powell's discoveries (and the creator of twelve brilliant covers for a collected edition of *Dance*) thought Powell "responsible for killing the idea that everything in the magazine had to be side-splitting."

But Powell's real achievement in life was *A Dance to the Music of Time*, which began with the publication of *A Question of Upbringing* in 1951. The complex scheme was a brilliant solution to a problem that had begun to dog him, as it has dogged so many writers: "Even before the war," Barber writes, "it had become apparent to him that he would always struggle with plots and that there was a limit to the number of times he could recycle the

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sort of characters who interested him. The solution he hit on—to write a long novel consisting of at least six volumes—would allow him to operate on a much broader front than he could hope to cover in 80,000 words."

Barber is right, I think, to call *Dance* "one novel" rather than a series of novels, for none of them stands on its own: one must read all or none. The organization of the material was a staggering job. "I am always torn," Powell wrote to Waugh, "between trying to emphasize the plot in order that the design should not seem woolly (and also for commercial reasons) and, on the other hand, trying to avoid too neatly contrived happenings that detract from its naturalism and may spoil the overall picture." Considering the scale of the work, he was largely successful, but it must be admitted that the naturalism does break down towards the end; the last three volumes, and particularly the Russell Gwinnett/Pamela Flitton/Widmerpool story, strain our credulity beyond endurance. The pattern is so clearly imposed, so very literary with its references to Poe and to Leslie Fiedler, that it is hard to reconcile with the sort of organic reality that has adhered to Widmerpool and all his doings through so many volumes. Widmerpool's midlife career as a co-conspirator of Burgess and Maclean is unconvincing, too theoretical an application of Powell's Will to Power theme; even more so is his decision, in his dotage, to join a hippie cult (although as a university chancellor pandering to campus radicals he is perfectly cast). The sequence finally ends, perhaps a volume or two later than it should have; but the final pages, with Widmerpool's death and Powell's reversion to the imagery of *A Question of Upbringing*'s first chapter, are a masterstroke.

Generally speaking, Powell's pattern is successful insofar as it imitates the repetitions and sometimes inspired coincidences of life itself: Nietzsche's "eternal recurrences," with which he was fascinated. As Waugh wrote in his review of *The Kindly Ones*, "[W]e watch [the characters] through the glass of a tank; one after another various specimens swim towards us; we see them clearly, then with a barely perceptible flick of a tail they are off into the murk. That is how our encounters occur in life. Friends or acquaintances approach or recede year by year." Close friends like Stringham and Moreland drop away, for friendship, like romantic love, appears to contain the seeds of its own dissolution. People one would never choose for a companion—Widmerpool, Odo Stevens, Pamela Flitton, Audrey Maclintick—recur, through life's mysterious rhythms, until their stories become an inextricable part of Jenkins' own. As he reflects, "certain acquaintances remain firmly fixed within this or that person's particular orbit; a law which seems to lead inexorably to the conclusion that the often repeated saying that people can 'choose their own friends' is true only in a most strictly limited degree."

"Life is full of internal dramas, instantaneous and sensational, played to an audience of one," Jenkins observes. Friendship is a way of sharing the drama, and in the last few volumes the particular drama of Widmerpool's strange career, which has amused Jenkins for so long, becomes tinged with *tristesse* since, with the passing of Stringham and Templer, he has no one left with whom to share it.

Moreland, in a disgruntled moment in *Books Do Furnish A Room*, attacks the notion of historical exceptionalism. "How bored one gets with the assumption that people now are organically different from people in the past—the Lost Generation, the New Poets, the Atomic Age." *A Dance to the Music of Time* is, among other things, a spirited affirmation of the immutability of human behavior. In the 1940s J. G. Quiggin edits a left-wing literary journal called *Fission*; twenty years later his radical daughters start a campus rag called *Toilet Paper*, which of course horrifies their father. Those who live long enough, like Jenkins, are privileged to watch the drama renew itself and begin all over again. From *Hearing Secret Harmonies*:

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> While a dismantling process steadily curtails members of the cast, items of the scenery, airs played by the orchestra, in the performance that has included one's own walk-on part for more than a few decades, simultaneous derequisitionings are also to be observed. Mummers return, who might have been supposed to have made their final exit. . . . The touching up of time-expired sets, reshaping of derelict props, updating of old refrains, are none of them uncommon.

Thus the mystical activities of Scorpio Murtlock and his cult, in the sequence's last volume, directly echo those of Dr. Trelawney, who flourished during Jenkins's childhood before the First World War: the two even use the same nonsensical formula, "The Essence of the All is the Godhead of the True." *Plus ça change*, in other words: each generation has its magi, and the basic differences between them are remarkably slight. Perhaps Mrs. Erdleigh is right—as indeed she so often is—when she claims that Death is merely an illusion.

But for all Powell's concern with reproducing life's patterns, James Stern was probably correct when he stated that to Powell "the story is not the thing: it is the place, the house, the hotel lounge, the prevailing fashion, the people." In terms of concrete, almost tangible imagery, he can hardly be matched, and for those of us too young to have experienced literary pub life in the Fifties, for example, or London during the Blitz, one feels that his descriptions carry an essential truth; this is what it was like. His affinity with the visual and plastic arts is everywhere apparent and feeds the immediacy of his images; where other novelists summon painterly images as a crutch, Powell uses them to enrich, rather than to replace, the prose images. From *The Kindly Ones* and *The Acceptance World*:

> We lived on this distant hilltop, miles away from the daily activities of troops, who were to be sighted only very occasionally on some local exercise to which summer manoeuvres had fortunately brought them. Even so much as the solitary outline of a Military Policeman was rare, jogging his horse across the heather, a heavy brushstroke of dark blue, surmounted by a tiny blob of crimson, moving in the sun through a Vuillard landscape of pinkish greys streaked with yellow and silver.

> Among a sea of countenances, stamped like the skin of Renoir's with that curiously pink, silky surface that seems to come from prolonged sitting about in Ritz hotels, I noticed several familiar faces.

I first read *Dance* when I was in my twenties, and though I loved and treasured it, it now seems clear that I couldn't have understood half of it. Though it is a book that appeals to the young, it is not a young person's book. One has to be middle-aged, to have experienced the almost arbitrary dissolution of love and friendship, the almost arbitrary apotheosis of some and degradation of others, to understand that Powell was not being gratuitously cruel to his characters but simply realistic. Death, for example: "As in musical chairs, the piano stops suddenly, someone is left without a seat, petrified for all time in their attitude of that particular moment. The balance-sheet is struck there and then, a matter of luck whether its calculations have much bearing, one way or the other, on the commerce conducted"

Powell's own death was not like this. Like the unkillable Sillery, he lived on, "sole survivor of his genus," missing his century by only a few years. His end, like that of so many of his characters, was an appropriate one: it is right and fitting that Jenkins should outlive his contemporaries and record the conclusion of the tale. As for Powell's own tale, Barber's biography, welcome though it is, is far from giving us the whole story or even a satisfactory part of it. Perhaps Hilary Spurling's will do the job; but somehow, one doubts it. It was Powell's style to stay backstage, and it will be very surprising if anyone, even an authorized biographer, ever succeeds in pulling him in front of the curtain for his bow.

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Petrarch: a splendid excess

by Eric Ormsby

This year marks the seventh centenary of Petrarch's birth, on July 20, 1304, in the town of Arezzo. The son of an exile—his father Petracco was of Dante's generation and exiled from Florence in the same wave—Petrarch was to spend his life in restless peregrination, moving back and forth from Italy to France and venturing at times as far afield as the Netherlands and Prague. In "A Letter to Posterity," he states (in J. G. Nichols's translation), "I was never able to stay still; and I went not so much from the desire to see once more what I had already seen a thousand times, but, as sick men do, endeavouring to cope with tedium by a change of scene." In fact, tedium—or what he more commonly terms "acedia"—motivated Petrarch as much as passion. The outer restlessness of his migratory life found its analogue in an inner turbulence which allowed him little of the peace he sought. His great *canzone* to Italy, the 128th poem in the *Canzoniere* (or *Songbook*), closes with the line that could have formed his motto, "I go my way imploring: peace, peace, peace" (*I' vo gridando: pace, pace, pace*).[1]

It's a textbook platitude that Petrarch is the first "modern man," but I'm not so sure that this assertion holds up. His apparent frankness, his jittery self-awareness, his sense of being a self divided against itself—"I see what's good but hold fast to the bad," he writes at the end of one *canzone*—do give this impression; but what we think of as "modernity" may just be the peculiar timelessness of an exceptionally searching author. If Petrarch is modern, then he is so in the same way that St. Augustine, his mentor (and tormentor), is modern. Both enunciate spiritual and psychological truths that are not bound to any particular age. It might be truer to say that Petrarch strove constantly to achieve the status of exemplar, using as his models certain figures from Classical Antiquity as well as from Christianity, but that the frail, unpredictable, and virtually ungovernable human element kept breaking through the mold. He insists, for example, on his fondness for rural solitude and the simple life; at the same time, he positively hungers for renown and the acclaim of crowds, the very rabble—or *turba*, in his contemptuous locution—which he affects to despise. In one of his Latin poems he writes about his life in the Vaucluse:

> Here is how my everyday life is arranged:
> My repast is light and I season it sparingly
> With weariness and hunger and protracted fast.
> A farm-hand serves me. My only society:
> My own self and a loyal hound. All others have left:
> Sensual delight, armed with Cupid's arrows,
> Has departed to gad about bustling towns.
> Only the sweet Muses, come out of exile,
> Share my seclusion. Visitors are scarce
> Summoned by the wonders of a famous spring.

1 *Canzoniere: Selected Poems*, by Petrarch, translated by Anthony Mortimer; Penguin, 197 pages, £7.99.

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Petrarch is a difficult poet to appreciate, let alone to translate, not only because of such rather transparent contradictions, but also because he lived in a world of analogues and we no longer do; this is the first, and perhaps the most serious, obstacle to a just assessment of his lyric poetry. All the occurrences of Petrarch's long life, as well as the persons he knew and dealt with, either in fervent love or bitter hatred, together with the many cities, rural haunts, and countries he frequented on his impetuous itinerary, serve at once as real, palpable, individual people and places and as intricate and subtle signs of some other suprasensual and enduring realm. Thus, when Petrarch makes his famous ascent of Mt. Ventoux, he notes all the topographical features with precision but he also comments: "What you have experienced so many times today in climbing this mountain, you must know happens to you and to many others as they come near to blessedness; but this is not readily understood by human beings, because while movements of the body are all in the open, those of the mind are of course invisible and hidden."

Unlike Dante, his difficult master, Petrarch does not people his world with indelibly distinct characters, each with his inalienable genealogy, birthplace, and homeland, virtues and vices, and ultimate destiny, once and for all time. Instead, the figures that inhabit his verse, at least in the vernacular, are almost ghostly; and yet, because of the passion that animates them, they are ghosts full of blood.

Apart from the predictable difficulties in translating from languages so different as Italian and English, the play of analogies bedevils us in Petrarch's work. Is Laura, his great poetic subject, a real woman or a phantom of the poet's brain? Is she merely the personification of love in a particular form, a Platonic simulacrum of some transcendent archetype? Is she the breathing embodiment of all his ambition and striving? Or is she, as seems more likely, all of these, and none of these, at once? We are no longer at ease in addressing—let alone falling in love with—archetypes; nowadays, any poet foolhardy enough to install his beloved on a Platonic pedestal would be more liable to see stars than perfected eidolons.

Allied to this impediment is another issue, perhaps equally insuperable. Despite the lofty seriousness of Petrarch's aesthetic, he is a highly playful poet, and the various tropes, conceits, figures, and forms he wields with such incomparable aplomb constitute a ritualized form of play, a game, but one for which we have lost the instructions. Games involve intelligent artifice. Players assume predetermined roles. The individual is submerged in the pattern. The sighing lover is one role, the chastely aloof lady another. Laura is simultaneously the woman of that name, the breeze (*l'aura*), and the laurel, both the plant itself, in its mythological and botanical aspects, and the poet's crown of glory, for which Petrarch hungered with such avidity (and which he eventually won). And the point of the game is not to dodge the rules and stratagems, but to move in accord with them with such consummate mastery and finesse as to lift the play to another level, a level of grace.

When we read Petrarch, or his scores of imitators, we acknowledge the verbal skill but question the sincerity. But the only sincerity that counts within this realm is the aptness of the analogical construction and the command of play. Sidney's famous, and very Petrarchan, line, "Foole, said my Muse to me, looke in thy heart and write!" embodies these twin merits (along with the added fillip of rather cynical wit), for the poem that leads up to this conclusion is concerned with everything but his "heart."

Petrarch too enjoys the effects of well-calculated startlement, and this gives many of his poems an oddly "modern" accent. But to work against the pattern is still to employ it. And what gives such moments great dramatic power is the illusion they create of a specific and sudden outcry framed by patterned discourse. When, for example, in Sonnet 211 of the *Canzoniere*, he records his first encounter with Laura, the exactitude surprises:

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In 1327, at precisely
The day's first hour, April 6, I entered
This labyrinth, and I've found no escape.[2]

In *Analogia Entis* (1932; 1962), his magisterial treatise on the subject, the Catholic theologian Erich Przywara noted that analogy is a "bridge" between the nothingness of the creature and the absolute being of God; the bridge of analogy spans the immeasurable distance between the *Nihil* of created beings and the supreme *Est* of God, most specifically in the fact that it is God who creates *ex nihilo*. But our intrinsic nothingness also represents sheer potentiality, as over against the sovereign actuality—the *actus purus*—of God. And it is in this sphere, compounded of yearning, half-realized aspirations, sudden twists of conscience, that Petrarch tossed for all his seventy years of life and which he recorded with scrupulous music in the 366 poems of his *Canzoniere*.

His love for Laura, he claims, impels him, but this love affords no solace; it is a fiery thorn in both his flesh and his spirit, for he lusts after Laura as much as he reveres her. "From thought to thought, from peak to mountain peak,/ Love moves me forward," he writes in Canzone 129. At times he rages at her image or speaks of the "lost days" of his life caused by his passion. At other times he seems to envisage the possibility of some future union when both are old and when he can tell her of the sufferings he endured for her; early on, in Sonnet 12, he writes touchingly:

If my life can withstand this bitter torment,
surviving tribulation long enough
to see your later years, my lady, dimming,
the light extinguished from your lovely eyes,

your head of fine gold hair transformed to
silver,
your garlands laid aside with your green
dresses,
your face drained very slowly of that color
which makes me hesitate and then lament,

then Love may also grant me timely courage
to speak at last of my great suffering,
to tell you of its years, its days, its hours;

if time should be adverse to my sweet wishes,
at least it won't prevent my pain receiving
some small relief from my belated sighs.

This sonnet gives a fair sample of David Young's translation, issued to coincide with the anniversary. *The Poetry of Petrarch* is misleadingly titled, since it excludes not only his Latin verse, on which Petrarch thought his glory rested, but also much of the other Italian sequences, such as the famous "Triumphs" (*I Trionfi*). The Italian originals are not included, but Young does translate the entire *Canzoniere*, no small accomplishment. His versions are clear, quite plain-spoken, and favor an odd melange of the high-flown with the colloquial, a combination Petrarch would have abhorred.

In his interesting and informative introduction, Young tells us that he set himself a difficult, if not impossible, objective in his translation: to capture the "living presence" of Petrarch in a way that preserves the flavor of the past "without cutting off access to my own language and my own world." To this end, he rejected rhyme along with all the antiquated diction so common in earlier versions, relying instead on assonance or "incidental rhymes" to convey the music of the original. The best that can be said of this approach is that sometimes it works, but more often it does not.

In the sonnet cited above, for example, Young must resort to hackneyed phrases such as "bitter torment" and "sweet wishes" and "belated sighs." He must also pad a bit, especially in the second stanza, where he fashions an entire line out of what takes Petrarch only three words to say: "your face drained very slowly of that color," as opposed to "e 'l viso scolorir" of the Italian. At the same time, he achieves a certain loveliness in the sixth line: "your garlands laid

2 *The Poetry of Petrarch*, translated by David Young; Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 312 pages, $30.

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aside with your green dresses." Unfortunately for him, however, the rhyme scheme carries much of the force of the poem. Petrarch chooses his rhymes not only for their sounds but to sharpen the impact of the sonnet; the rhymes are integral to the sense. There is a small bitter jolt when he rhymes *panni* ("clothes") with *danni* ("injuries"), just as in the two triple rhymes of the sestet Petrarch rings the changes on the whole anguished history of his love by rhyming on *Amore* ("love"), *ore* ("hours") and *dolore* ("sorrow"), interlaced with *martiri* ("torments"), *desiri* ("desires") and *sospiri* ("sighs"). The outward course of his passion is set in dissonant counterpoint with his innermost suffering, in a single cruel but melodious arc. Young's approach inevitably sacrifices such piercing felicities.

I say this not to carp, for I realize the difficulty of what Young has attempted. Nevertheless, his strategy, while well intentioned, seems to me to miss an essential point. The bare meaning of Petrarch's poetry comes through clearly in his translations, but at the same time we find ourselves forced to acknowledge that the mere meaning doesn't amount to much. The reason for this is simple: the meaning is in the manner. Strip that away and not much is left. However sincerely Young wishes to make Petrarch "accessible" to his students and to contemporary readers, he does so only by making him quite a different poet. When Petrarch employs a phrase like *aspro tormento* ("harsh torment"), he is using a stock phrase, hallowed by his predecessors (Dante chief among them). It isn't an original formulation and he knows it. What matters is how he will elaborate variations on the phrase, weaving it into the final configuration of the finished poem. Every lover suffers "harsh torment." So what? But not every lover will take such a hoary conceit and spin it out so cunningly that as we read we feel the fresh force of the experience as though it had not been felt before, as though some opaque much-handled mineral had been made suddenly to shine in unaccustomed fluorescence. Only a Petrarch can do that.

To capture this in English, hard as it may seem, is not impossible. The Elizabethans did it, and beautifully so. But they possessed not only an English in the first exuberance of its young strength—they also possessed the Petrarchan "code." Like Petrarch, they felt and understood love as a bittersweet and ritual play, a drama as well as a game, rife with encrypted gestures, signs, and presages. Their beloveds were not solely Stella and Celia and Laura, but embodiments of a transcendent ideal; they were, in Emerson's wonderful phrase, "ambassadors of the infinite" encountered on the common street. In Sonnet 159, again in Young's translation, Petrarch begins:

> What part of Heaven was it, what Idea,
> Where Nature found the pattern of that face,
> That lovely visage that she brought down here
> To show the capabilities up there?

It would be unfair to compare Young's with the versions of Petrarch crafted by Sir Thomas Wyatt or Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey, in the sixteenth century, but anyone, even a beginning student, can appreciate the beauty and force of their translations. Take Wyatt's rendering of Sonnet 134 as an instance of what could once be achieved:

> I find no peace and all my war is done,
> I fear and hope, I burn and freeze like ice,
> I fly above the wind, yet can I not arise,
> And naught I have and all the world I seize
> on;
> That looseth nor locketh holdeth me in prison,
> And holdeth me not; yet can I 'scape nowise;
> Nor letteth me live nor die at my devise,
> And yet of death it giveth none occasion.
>
> Without eyen I see; and without tongue
> I plain;
> I desire to perish, and yet I ask health;
> I love another, and thus I hate myself;
> I feed me in sorrow, and laugh in all my pain.
> Likewise displeaseth me both death and life,
> And my delight is causer of this strife.

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Wyatt certainly takes liberties, not only in his rhythms but in changing the rhyme scheme of the sestet to what would later be known as the "Shakespearean" model, and yet, how perfectly he strikes the true Petrarchan note! (In line 5, by the way, "that" should be understood as "that love," or Laura herself.) The old tropes have been whetted anew; the paradoxes, blunted by overuse, have been given new edges and can slash again.

Young pays due tribute to Wyatt and it is further to his credit that his own version of this sonnet holds up well; of course, he is no Wyatt—who today is?—but his version is clear and energetic, as well as more accurate. Even so, the poem has been merely rendered, not assimilated and made part of his own experience, as in Wyatt:

> I find no peace, and yet I am not warlike;
> I fear and hope, I burn and turn to ice;
> I fly beyond the sky, stretch out on earth;
> my hands are empty, yet I hold the world.

Young relies heavily on Robert K. Durling's 1976 scholarly prose translation (*Petrarch's Lyric Poems*; Harvard University Press) and it shows, in both the clarity and the prosiness of his versions. Strangely, however, he does not mention the translations by Anthony Mortimer which I cited earlier. To my mind (or ear), these are the most successful renditions of Petrarch available. Mortimer provides only a small selection from the *Canzoniere*, but he does include the Italian *en face*, together with a fine introduction, concise but discerning notes, and a chronology of the poet's life. Best of all, he translates the sonnets, *canzoni*, sestinas, and songs with close adherence to their original forms, and he makes judicious use of rhyme. Here is how he translates the opening sonnet of the *Canzoniere*:

> All you that hear in scattered rhymes the sound
> of sighs on which I used to feed my heart
> in youthful error when I was in part
> another man, and not what I am now,
>
> for the vain hopes, vain sorrows I avow,
> the tears and discourse of my varied art,
> in any who have played a lover's part
> pity I hope to find, and pardon too.
>
> But now I plainly see how I became
> a mocking tale that common people tell,
> and in myself my self I put to shame;
>
> and of my raving all the fruit is shame,
> and penitence, and knowing all too well
> that what the world loves is a passing dream.

Mortimer eschews perfect rhymes, and even resorts to *rime riche* on one occasion, but he catches the momentum, and the intricacy, of the diction; the urgency of those tolling "ands" of the sestet—ignored by Young in his version—as well as the clever, faintly old-fashioned inversions of subject and object carry the burden of the poem with spare but melodious panache.

Petrarch has been so inextricably associated with the tribulations of unrequited love that we are apt to forget what an accomplished hater he was. If we have lost or forgotten the cryptography of Petrarchan love, we have also relinquished the ancient art of elegant hatred, of which Petrarch was so consummate a practitioner. Petrarch had many moods as well as modes, often simultaneously; he wept and moaned magnificently; he chanted praises and hurled invectives; he alternately flagellated and glorified himself, all in splendid and well calibrated excess. But as a hater he is, after Dante, in a class by himself. This is well exemplified in the recently published *Invectives*, translated by David Marsh in the beautiful new series "The I Tatti Renaissance Library" with the Latin text facing.[3] (The series, of which some dozen volumes have appeared, is a kind of Loeb Classical Library for Renaissance Latin texts.) Even in the *Canzoniere*, of course, Petrarch gave

3 *Invectives*, by Francesco Petrarca, edited & translated by David Marsh; Harvard University Press, 559 pages, $29.95.

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vent to his spleen, particularly in excoriating the "Babylonian Captivity" of the Church in Avignon, where his father had found employment (he himself spent much of his childhood in nearby Carpentras). When Milton intoned the hope that his co-religionists "early may fly the Babylonian woe," he was echoing the Petrarch of these vituperative sonnets. A good example is Sonnet 136, in Mortimer's translation, the final lines of which read:

> Old men and girls go frisking through
> your chambers,
> And Beelzebub is always there at hand
> With mirrors and with bellows for the fire.
>
> You were not bred on cushions in the shade,
> But barefoot among thorns, bare to the wind:
> Now may the stench of how you live reach
> God.

The *Invectives* constitute an unrelieved exercise in savage vituperation, as coarse as they are poised. Against a physician, Petrarch fulminates: "In the hope of a little vile gain, you frequent the latrines of both popes and paupers," branding him "an insincere and disgusting adulator," "a cold viper," "an industrious mouse," a "mercenary mechanic," a lunatic and a fool, and—unkindest cut of all—a hoopoe. ("The hoopoe is a bird with a plumed crest, which children think is quite something. But in truth it is very unclean and eats a filthy diet." The hoopoe was believed to feed on corpses and excrement). I have to admit that although it is initially refreshing, in this age of narcotic niceness, to be buffeted by the cascades of Petrarch's fury, the cumulative effect is tiresome. For this reason, if no other, I doubt that this handsome volume will displace the latest *Field and Stream* or *Reader's Digest* in doctors' waiting rooms.

All of these jeremiads, including the arrestingly entitled "On His Own Ignorance and That of Many Others," show us, more plainly than the poetry can, how far removed we are from Petrarch and his age. The invective begins:

> Shall I never have a moment's peace? Will my pen be harassed forever? Shall I have no days of rest? Must I reply to the praises of friends each day, and each day to the insults of foes? Will no refuge exclude envy, and no length of time extinguish it? Shall I obtain no quiet by fleeing nearly everything for which humankind toils and burns? Will not my declining and decrepit age bring me some respite? O unrelenting poison!

The effect of Petrarch's unremittingly vainglorious prose stupefies in the end; the invective is made even more repellent by the beauty of its language. Petrarch commands every weapon in the arsenal of anathema and, like some Achilles of the inkpot, uses each one with a cold and killing elegance. It isn't the abuse that repels—Petrarch is a virtuoso of inventive insult—but the calculation that drives it.

We are as suspicious of hatred when it is rhetorical as we are of love. Artifice strikes us as emblematic of insincerity; and yet, only through artifice of the most elaborate and intricate sort—an authentic artifice, as it were—could Petrarch articulate his passion, whether of love or of hate, with the utmost sincerity.

Laura died in 1348, Petrarch in 1374; for the twenty-six years after her death, he continued to write love poems to her. Can we imagine a poet doing that today? We can annotate and elucidate Petrarch's coded language; the new Italian edition of the *Canzoniere* requires over 1600 pages for footnotes and commentary.

We can understand Petrarch as we can the worldview of a Trobriand Islander, but we can no longer feel and articulate love and hate as he, or his Elizabethan followers, did. We are perhaps too immersed in what Eliot termed "the general mess of imprecision of feeling"—one affliction certainly not visited on Petrarch—to conceive of passion in terms of artifice and analogy. And that makes the attempt to English his poetry a steeper challenge than the climb up Mt. Ventoux.

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Mr. Hyde & the epidemiology of evil

by Theodore Dalrymple

No one feels called upon to explain, or explain away, his good deeds or qualities, which are taken to arise from his essential being as naturally and irresistibly as a river from its source, but most people feel the necessity when it comes to their bad deeds or moral failings. That is why the problem of evil is so much more compelling than the problem of good, for evil—especially one's own—is assumed to be against the natural order of things. Ever since Rousseau, man has been born not with original sin, but with original virtue. The question therefore arises as to how beings so inherently good often turn out to be so horribly bad.

One way of solving the problem is by appeal to the phenomenon of doubling. At least once a week, usually more often, a patient in my clinic describes himself to me as a Jekyll and Hyde. The assumption always is, of course, that the Jekyll is the real him or her, while the Hyde is an intruder, alien, or interloper. The transformation from Jekyll to Hyde is often effected, as it is in the novella, by a chemical substance, though one less cinematic than that described by Stevenson:

> The mixture, which was at first of a reddish hue, began, in proportion as the crystals melted, to brighten in colour, to effervesce audibly, and to throw off small fumes of vapour. Suddenly and at the same moment, the ebullition ceased and the compound changed to dark purple, which faded again more slowly to a watery green.

How that passage takes me back to my adolescent days in the chemistry lab, when we would heat and mix chemicals just for the thrill of releasing gaseous iodine, a violet vapor whose transience in that state introduced us to the bittersweet impermanence of excitement, pleasure and beauty.

No, the substances that transform (or are alleged to transform) our modern Jekylls into Hydes are alcohol, cannabis, and cocaine. The transformative effect, however, is not purely pharmacological: for many a Jekyll and Hyde has told me that a quantity of alcohol taken as beer does not have the terrible consequences for his character as the same quantity taken as whisky. I suspect that it is the knowledge, or rather rumor, of Stevenson's gothic tale that is the really necessary ingredient for the transformation.

Even the most unliterary people, who have never read a book in their lives, make use of the Jekyll and Hyde metaphor, and perhaps it is not surprising therefore that some of the subtleties of the story are lost in the self-serving use to which it is put by them. Interestingly, those who are unfortunate enough to live with a self-proclaimed Jekyll and Hyde also refer to the story, as if it provided a true physiological explanation of the changes that come over their loved, or loved and feared, one. I've heard "He's a Jekyll and Hyde character" as often as I've heard "I'm a Jekyll and Hyde character."

In the mouth of the wrongdoer, the

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metaphor is, of course, an exculpatory one. Its function is to allow a person to do evil and yet think of himself as essentially good. Intoxication with alcohol or cannabis has another great advantage: when severe enough, it destroys, or rather prevents, memory for events, and it is difficult to feel truly guilty for acts which one does not remember having committed. It allows the miscreant to say, as many have said to me, "It's not me (Jekyll) who did those things, because they are not the kind of things I (Jekyll) do." No, it was someone else; in short, Hyde. Ergo, I (Jekyll) am innocent.

As for the person who claims that her lover is a Jekyll and Hyde, the metaphor serves to preserve and justify her love for him, despite all the evidence that he is unworthy of it. The transformation being a physical or a physiological one, he cannot truly help himself. His evil is therefore to be pitied rather than condemned; he may strangle his lover occasionally ("But not all the time, doctor"), yet he retains his inner core of goodness. Therefore he is essentially lovable; and therefore also it is not absurd that she remains with him, which—for a variety of reasons—is what she wants and is determined to do.

Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* was not the first tale of doubling in Scottish literature, of course. In some ways, its forerunner, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions of a Justified Sinner*, published anonymously by James Hogg sixty-two years earlier, in 1824, is even more illuminating as a source of our modern penchant for gnostic psychobabble. It has not entered the popular consciousness as Stevenson's *Strange Case* has done; no patient has ever said to me, "I'm a Robert Wringhim, doctor"; there are too many ambiguities in the story, the style is too convoluted, the resort to Scots dialect too frequent, for any line, scene, or character from it to have become universally recognized.

Robert Wringhim is the son, possibly the natural son, but possibly also the adopted son (the text does not make it entirely clear), of the Reverend Wringhim, a fierce Calvinist churchman, and Mrs. Colwan, herself something of a religious fanatic, who is the estranged wife of a hedonistic Scottish lowland landowner, George Colwan, by whom she has a legitimate son, also called George. George Junior and Robert are temperamentally opposite, as well as rivals and (in Robert's eyes, at least) enemies. George takes after his father, Robert after the Reverend Wringhim.

Robert is convinced by the Reverend Wringhim that he is one of the saved, according to the Calvinist doctrine of predestination. Thereafter, the ground having been laid for his success, the devil in human form approaches Robert. He has the power to take on the appearance of whomever he addresses: he is the universal double, a faculty suggesting that the devil resides within all of us. Robert, however, mistakes his double for a genuine theological and moral guide. He persuades Robert to begin the great work of ridding the world of the ungodly, and together they kill a good and inoffensive preacher called Blanchard. Subsequently, Robert pursues his brother and finally kills him, inherits the family estate, and leads a debauched existence, though the book does not make it entirely clear whether it is Robert himself who commits all the crimes, his true alter ego, or the devil disguised as Robert.

What Hogg does make clear are the moral consequences of believing in original—that is to say, predestined—virtue. The Reverend Wringhim tells Robert

> how he had wrestled with God . . . not for a night, but for days and years . . . on my account; but that he had at last prevailed, and had now gained the long and earnestly desired assurance of my acceptance with the Almighty, in and through the sufferings of his Son. That I was now a justified person . . . my name written in the Lamb's book of life, and that no by-past transgression, nor any future act of my own . . . could be instrumental in altering the decree. "All the powers of darkness," added he,

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> "shall never be able to pluck you again out of your Redeemer's hand."

This is a belief that does not necessarily provide a strong incentive for virtue, to put it mildly, and it is not a coincidence that the devil seeks shortly afterwards to reinforce it. The devil says:

> "Now, when you know, as you do (and as every one of the elect may know of himself) that this Saviour died for you, namely and particularly, dare you say that there is not enough merit in His great atonement to annihilate all your sins, let them be as heinous and atrocious as they may? And, moreover, do you not acknowledge that God hath pre-ordained and decreed whatsoever comes to pass? Then, how is it that you should deem it in your power to eschew one action in your life . . . none of us knows what is pre-ordained, but whatever is pre-ordained we must do, and none of these things will be laid to our charge."

The man who is saved can therefore do as he pleases, and remain thoroughly saved. Rousseauvian man, who is good by his essential nature, can do evil and yet remain at heart good. A famous, or rather infamous, speech by Himmler to senior SS officers in Posen in 1943, is the ne plus ultra of this line of thought:

> Most of you will know what it means when a hundred corpses lie together, when five hundred or a thousand are lying there. To go through all this . . . and yet remain decent men. . . . This is a glorious page in our history, a page which has never been written and which can never be written.

The man who commits genocide thus preserves his inner core of goodness and decency, which can no more be destroyed by a hard day's slaughter than can Robert Wringhim's election be overturned by his conduct.

What Rousseau did, then, was merely to democratize Calvinist election (he wasn't a Swiss for nothing, after all). The Calvinist elect were a small and elite, if not necessarily happy, band of men; for Rousseau, every man was elect merely by virtue of drawing breath, because he was a member of the human species, even if the veneer with which society subsequently covered him concealed his essential goodness.

In fact, my patients who explain their own evil conduct by reference to Jekyll and Hyde exactly overturn the meaning not only of the *Strange Case* itself, but also of its Scots forerunner, *The Private Memoirs and Confessions*. Both Hogg and Stevenson make it clear that, far from being extraneous to the characters of Robert Wringhim and Henry Jekyll, evil is intrinsic to them, and by extension, to the whole of humanity. They believe in original sin, not original virtue.

In the case of Robert Wringhim, not only does his belief in his own moral election predispose him to the commission of evil, but he is bad by his very nature. His account of his childhood and adolescence, for example, makes it clear that he was born both envious and unscrupulous, with a tendency to hypocrisy and bearing false witness. When a serving man of the Reverend Wringhim "discovered some notorious lies that I had framed . . . my cheek burned with offence rather than shame." And he then exults in denouncing him, for the sake of revenge, to the Reverend Wringhim.

In his youth, Robert Wringhim is in competition with his brother (or half-brother). George Colwan is the kind of boy who is at ease with himself and others, who is popular and, while no dunce, is a sportsman *moyen sensuel*. Robert seeks to compensate for his own awkwardness, and awareness that he will never equal George in social graces, by academic prowess. In order to do this, of course, he has to be the best scholar in his class; no other position but the top will do. Unfortunately, good scholar though he is, there is a boy in his class who is greatly and effortlessly more gifted than he, called M'Gill. In order to achieve preeminence, he brings M'Gill

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down by a series of subterfuges and dirty tricks.

This raises the question whether men choose doctrines, or doctrines choose men, in accordance with their temperaments. It is clear that Robert Wringhim is temperamentally predisposed to the doctrine of election by predestination because it is a convenient mask for his own unscrupulousness. Even before the Reverend Wringhim tells Robert that he is one of the chosen, and his double, the devil, leads him yet further astray, he uses religion as a cover for his envy. "I strove [academically] against him [M'Gill] from year to year, but it was all in vain; for he was a very wicked boy, and I was convinced he had dealings with the Devil." In other words, any means of destroying him were theologically justified, though it takes very little to see that Robert is not intent upon punishing evil but in advancing himself. Robert's sense of election and entitlement to do wrong precede his adoption of the doctrine of predestination in all its fullness.

So Hogg, *pace* my Jekyll and Hyde patients, is not saying that evil is external to man, that it requires an external force to lead him astray to perpetrate it. He is saying that there is evil in the heart of man, evil that finds expression if the wrong doctrines are propagated and adopted, and if the man with a natural propensity to evil finds or is found by an evil genius, within him or without. But he leaves one aspect of the mystery of evil as mysterious as he found it: for why should Robert Wringhim have been born with an evil temperament, as the book implies? The devil tries his blandishments with the good preacher, Blanchard, whom he and Robert eventually kill, but to no effect, because Blanchard is a good man who is proof against the devil's wiles. Why should Blanchard be as naturally good as Robert Wringhim is naturally bad? And if a man is good by nature, is he good at all, given that virtue depends on the existence of choice? To what extent, in other words, are we responsible for our own temperaments?

A closer reading of Stevenson's *Strange Case* than most of my patients ever give it who invoke Jekyll and Hyde to explain their own evil provides a partial answer. For them the fact that they sometimes turn into Hyde is an illness, an involuntary departure from their normal state, which of course is that of Jekyll. But in Stevenson's parable, it becomes harder and harder for Hyde to turn back into Jekyll. Once he has been Hyde for too long, the transformative chemicals lose their power, and have to be taken in ever larger doses before they both lose their efficacy altogether and can no longer even be obtained: in short, Jekyll has become Hyde permanently. "The powers of Hyde seemed to have grown with the sickliness of Jekyll." In other words, if you practice evil, you become evil. Character is habit.

Moreover, Jekyll does not start out as a paragon of virtue. He is, he informs us, 90 percent virtuous (and it is not given to many of us, after all, to be more virtuous than that). The evil is already within him, waiting to pounce, as it is within all of us. The chemicals do not *create* the evil—they release it from the chains in which virtue has hitherto imprisoned it. Jekyll is a very fortunate man, blessed with money, high intelligence, and great gifts, and he starts out with decent sentiments and principles. But once he gives in to the attractions of evil, he decisively changes the balance between good and evil within him.

This is not what my patients mean when they say they are Jekyll and Hyde characters. What they mean is that they are Jekyll (not 90 percent good, but 100 percent good, à la Rousseau), and that an external force over which they have no control turns them to absolute evil to which they have no natural propensity. Thus, a self-proclaimed Jekyll and Hyde will describe what he does that is bad or evil: he puts his hand around his girlfriend's throat, for example, and squeezes, or pulls her across the room by her hair, or shatters her jaw, or blacks her eyes, and so forth, not once, but repeatedly, many times, over periods of years, joyously,

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and then will blandly assert that "It's not me, doctor, I don't do those things."

Who is it, then? Why, Mr. Hyde, of course. And Mr. Hyde is as invasive, as extraneous to the normal course of things, as pathological in the literal sense, as a brain tumor. What does one do with a brain tumor? One finds a neurosurgeon to excise it. Similarly with Mr. Hyde—one seeks a sweet, oblivious antidote to exorcise him.

It is curious how a work of literature such as Stevenson's *Strange Case* should have supplied a universal metaphor, and yet one that is almost always used in a sense precisely the opposite of the meaning that a deeper consideration of the story itself might suggest. Far from implying that evil is an alien force over which we have no control—that invades us as an alien—Stevenson is telling us that our capacity for evil will be indefinitely enlarged, until it overwhelms us utterly, if we make a habit of indulging in it. To claim to be a Jekyll and Hyde character is not a mitigating but an aggravating circumstance.

Could it even be that a misguided notion of the meaning of Jekyll and Hyde has actually contributed to the prevalence of evil in Western societies? I know of no studies in the epidemiology of evil, but my impression (admittedly derived from the rather peculiar circumstances of my medical practice) is that evil, at least in the sphere of daily social relations, grows ever more prevalent. Perhaps I have merely reached the age of despair, when youthful optimism seems shallow and callow, but yet the willingness with which people explain evil away by reference to Jekyll and Hyde, as a putative neurological condition, has never been greater.

Only today, for example, I was consulted by a patient who had tried to kill herself because she had found her boyfriend in bed with another woman. As he had spent several years accusing her of infidelity, to the extent that he would allow her out of her house only on sufferance, and then provided that she dress as unattractively as possible, this was too much for her, and she swallowed the nearest pills.

"Has he ever been violent to you?" I asked, knowing the answer in advance.

Well, not very violent. He had hit her many times. He had once split her lip and "cracked" (as she put it) her jaw.

"But of course," I said, "when he's nice, he's very nice."

"Yes," she said. "He's a real Jekyll and Hyde."

It crossed my mind that perhaps she would have had a clearer-sighted view of her own situation if Stevenson had never written his story, if Jekyll and Hyde had never entered popular consciousness. Could it be that no knowledge of literature is better than a misunderstanding of literature?—a question at least worth considering as we contemplate the condition of our humanities departments?

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New poems
by William Logan, Kevin Durkin & U. S. Dhuga

Cedar Key after storm

for Donald Justice, 1925–2004

The fish shacks turned an oystery glow,
the drowned light more intense.
Along the blank sky low
clouds learned from experience.

A bridge leapt over the inlet
where sawtooth reeds had bedded,
like spears in rusting silhouette,
as the summer storm receded.

Carved from gray blocks of wood,
enormous sad pelicans
on the concrete balustrade stood
stiff as librarians,

as if they dimly knew
the mighty events to come.
The distant thunder grew
fainter, like a brushed kettle-drum.

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And you were a great bird, sickly,
fleeing the northern weather.
Ten years had passed quickly
since we watched the Gulf together.

Look back, you said, at the theft
of boredom, and jazz, and the rages,
and see what little is left—
just a book of the thinnest pages.

Your voice was the gentlest whisper,
your health had gone so fast.
Of all the things you were,
perhaps this would be the last.

—*William Logan*

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Lightning bugs

We used to keep our lightning bugs in jars
with holes punched through the lids so they'd have air.
They'd creep along the sides, their yellow stars
dimming to green in protest of our care.

To woo dark females hidden in the grass,
the bugs we failed to catch would gently rise
like champagne bubbles in a twilit glass,
filling the air with soft light and surprise.

Why did we want them if they couldn't give
the same delight when captured as when free?
We must have known they hadn't long to live,
yet, charmed by them, we couldn't let them be.

Beyond our grasp, erratic bats would weave
the spaces between maple crowns together
while clouds turned purple and the wind's long sleeve
swept our flushed cheeks, suggesting rougher weather.

—Kevin Durkin

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Etc.

for L. E. M.

We give no compensation,
The earth is ours today,
And if we lose on arable,
Then bungalows will pay.

All concrete sheds . . . etc.
—John Betjeman, "Harvest Hymn"

We rowed out to Paquachuck Inn
Too late to get the morning papers.
All week we had been sleeping in:
All night we'd listen to the breakers'
Slow consoling roar,
After days spent on the shore
In rippling arguments
Among the salty scents
Of Buzzard's Bay.
I won't forget that one calm day
We rowed out to the Inn at last in time
To get the papers: that air of kelp and thyme
And you stay with me in East Anglia,
Anglesey, Polzeath, Daymer . . . etc.

—*U. S. Dhuga*

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London journal

The phobia of phobias

by John Gross

London recently underwent a visit from Dr. Yusuf al-Qaradawi. A celebrated Muslim cleric, born in Egypt but based in Qatar, he had accepted an invitation to address a conference organized by the Muslim Association of Britain.

Dr. al-Qaradawi (who is barred from entering the United States) is a man of strong views. He condones wife-beating. He advocates the persecution—indeed, under some circumstances, the extermination—of homosexuals. He is a fervent supporter of Palestinian suicide-bombings, including bombings carried out by children, and he has offered up prayers for the destruction of "crusaders and infidels." (He also maintains that McDonald's and Pizza Hut are part of an international Jewish conspiracy.)

Not surprisingly, the news of his visit to London prompted widespread protests. These were countered by British Muslim spokesmen with reassurances that he was held in high regard by coreligionists for his learning and piety. One or two added that he should in fact be considered a moderate (an alarming thought, if true). And when he arrived in Britain, al-Qaradawi himself was offered a platform by the *Guardian* newspaper—an interview in which he claimed that his views had been completely misrepresented. (The published record says otherwise, however, both in print and on the web.)

Extremist Muslim clerics aren't a novelty in Britain, and the whole episode might have died down quickly if it weren't for the role played by the Mayor of London, Ken Livingstone. As readers who follow British affairs will recall, Livingstone is mayor of the whole of London, all 620 square miles of it. His post, which shouldn't be confused with the ancient and largely ceremonial office of Lord Mayor, was created by the Blair government. One of the advantages it was supposed to confer was that Londoners would at last feel that they had a First Citizen—someone who could serve, if the need arose, as their spokesman and representative.

And how did the First Citizen comport himself on this occasion? Although many opponents of the al-Qaradawi visit hoped that he would join them in their condemnation, there was a case for his saying nothing. The affair wasn't strictly the mayor's business. But as it is, he chose to intervene. He hosted a press conference for al-Qaradawi at City Hall, welcoming him warmly and sitting through a speech in which the cleric defended "martyrdom" operations. At a second conference, on the rights of Muslim women to wear traditional headdress, he hugged him; he invited him to return to London later this year, and lashed out at critics of the visit as bigoted and xenophobic.

People shouldn't have been altogether surprised. On Israel, Livingstone's record is well known; as they say in the British underworld, he has "form." In the 1980s, when

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he was head of what was then the city's main administrative body, the Greater London Council, he waged a bitter propaganda campaign against Israel. He said some peculiar things, too. In one interview he asserted that Jews in Britain were organizing a secret network of fascist-style paramilitary groups.

From here to his embrace of Dr. al-Qaradawi some twenty years later was no great step—not as far as the politics of the Middle East are concerned, at least. But it might still seem odd that he shouldn't have felt the need to distance himself a little from the good doctor on other issues. He has always been an outspoken champion of feminists and gay activists. Far milder examples of prejudice against women or gays than al-Qaradawi's would normally incur his wrath.

The only conclusion one can draw is that for the time being he regards homophobia and the maltreatment of women as secondary issues. They have been overshadowed in his mind by a greater menace—the phobia of phobias, Islamophobia.

He is hardly alone in this. The idea that Islamophobia is the most dangerous of current social evils had taken root within a few days, perhaps even hours, of 9/11, and since then it has become widely accepted wisdom. We are constantly warned to be on guard against prejudice toward Muslims. We have inevitably been instructed that British society is "institutionally Islamophobic."

Islamophobia is a word which means a number of different things, and the confusion which can result suits many of those who use it very well. At one extreme it covers the brutal racism of the BNP (the British National Party) and its supporters. But it is also freely employed to describe virtually any adverse criticism, however well-founded, of Muslim activities. Among educated people (who are probably the only ones who use it) it is a scare-word. It serves not so much to denote a phobia as to instill one.

The BNP is an ugly phenomenon, but it remains relatively small and marginal. Meanwhile, the media tend to be chary of highlighting the increasing importance of Muslim pressure in mainstream British politics. Earlier this summer there were shock results in two simultaneous parliamentary by-elections, in constituencies in Birmingham and Leicester. Both seats had previously been held by Labour with solid majorities: in one, they just scraped home against the Liberal Democrats (the only major party whose leadership is firmly against the Iraq war), in the other, the Liberal Democrats defeated them. That the Muslim vote played a significant part in the outcome could hardly be ignored—in both constituencies Muslims comprise around 20 percent of the electorate—but there was rather less reporting of the fact that in both cities the candidates outbid each other in falling in with the views put to them by local Muslim leaders. Those views primarily concerned Iraq and Palestine, rather than domestic issues; in Leicester, just so nobody should miss the point, the tribunal which questioned candidates called itself the "Friends of Al-Aqsa Committee."

No doubt it is important to maintain a sense of perspective. In Britain as a whole, Muslims at present form only around 3 percent of the population. But the proportion seems bound to grow (both through immigration and on account of the higher Muslim birthrate), and in the meantime Muslims stand out by their greater religious commitment. According to official sources, the number of British Muslims attending a mosque at least once a week has now overtaken the number of Anglicans attending church.

This last statistic reveals as much about the Church of England as it does about Islam. The decline of the "C of E" has been a notable feature of English life over the past generation or two. It is a decline shared, in varying degrees, by other Christian denominations in Britain, but in the case of what is still, technically speaking, the Established Church, the repercussions go well beyond questions of religious belief. The Church

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was until recently one of the central institutions of English society; it did a great deal to give English culture its distinctive tone.

What is particularly sad (and often, alas, also quite funny) is the inanity in which it has been willing to indulge in an effort to win back popularity. The Bishop of London, for instance, has solemnly urged churches to learn from the example of "clubbing." ("There is a sense of belonging and openness to one another and sometimes even what people describe as a mystical experience, induced by the music and dancing . . ." Chemical substances play their part, too: "Ecstasy, the drug, comes with a mystic sign embossed upon the tablets.") And then there is *Good as New*, a new updated version of the New Testament, in which Peter becomes Rocky, Mary Magdalen becomes Maggie, Barabbas becomes Barry, and Zacchaeus for some reason becomes Keith. Nor is it only names that have been given a makeover. "Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" is transmogrified into "That's my boy! You're doing fine!" It used to be "Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees!"; now the "Holy Joes and humbugs" are told to "take a running jump."

Strictly speaking, the Church of England isn't responsible for *Good as New*. It is the work of a freelance translator, and is published independently. But it does carry a foreword by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Rowan Williams, in which he describes it as a work of "extraordinary power" and commends it for being "close to the prose and poetry of ordinary life."

Perhaps one shouldn't judge too harshly, at a time when Christianity is increasingly on the defensive. Christians have found themselves up against a human rights culture which insists that they must not only respect other religions, but frequently give way to them as well. Even a Christian playgroup for toddlers is liable to be monitored to make sure that it celebrates non-Christian festivals.

Amid all this, the Government is introducing legislation to make the promotion of religious hatred a crime. It is plainly designed to protect Muslims, since other groups are regarded as being protected by existing laws against race-hate, and it will no doubt do some good, but in the light of the looser definitions of Islamophobia that fly around, it also opens up the possibility of serious restrictions on free speech.

At least there is very little chance of the Church of England falling foul of the new law. It has bent over backwards to avoid offending Muslim opinion—maintaining an eerie silence on the persecution of Christians in the Sudan, for instance. Church leaders have also been prominent critics of the war in Iraq, while the entire bench of Anglican bishops recently sent a letter to Tony Blair deploring the influence of "Christian Zionists" (curious phrase) on American policy in the Middle East.

And now Rowan Williams is planning to fly to Cairo to deliver a message of reconciliation in an address at Al-Azhar University on September 11. It takes two to tango, however, and it takes two to reconcile, and it doesn't augur well that Muslim leaders are reported to have welcomed his mission as an opportunity to dispel the ill will created by his predecessor, Archbishop Carey, who earlier this year criticized them for failing to condemn suicide bombers unequivocally. No one doubts Williams's good intentions, but if he doesn't offer criticism as well as praise when he is in Cairo, the chief practical result of his visit will probably be to confirm Islamic terrorists in their conviction that the West is soft and fundamentally weak.

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Theater

Summer in Williamstown

by Mark Steyn

Eight decades ago, in *Strange Interlude*, Eugene O'Neill created the longest role yet written for an actress: Nina Leeds, a woman torn between two men. Groucho Marx got the gist of it in *Animal Crackers*, when he observed to a couple of cuties: "We three would make an ideal couple. Pardon me while I have a strange interlude." But O'Neill fleshed it out a bit and, as was his wont, wound up with a good five hours of unrelenting tragedy. Lynne Fontanne was cast as Nina and asked her friend Noel Coward for some advice on the role, which required him to endure two sittings of what he described as "the whole bloody nine acts of that bore."

Five years later, Coward offered his own take on triangular couples in *Design for Living*, once again with Lynne Fontanne as the woman and with Alfred Lunt and Coward himself as the men. In its summer revival, the Williamstown Theatre Festival somehow manages to turn Coward's lightly worn *ménage à trois* into a *ménage à trois heures*. No comedy should last three hours, because nothing is funny that long. The elongation of the play isn't due to the Coward Estate's discovery of an extra couple of acts in a bottom drawer, but because Hugh Landwehr's sleekly glamorous sets are so extravagant their erection and dismantling require two intermissions almost as long as the acts. The play itself is barely the sum of its own pair of strange interludes.

Intermission is one of those things summer theater does better than New York. The cool deep air of a New England August night with starry skies above seems less disruptive than Broadway, where the unconvivial managements drive you out on to the sidewalks and alleys to stand among the passing parade of city life for fifteen minutes, more than long enough to make you figure the whole suspension-of-disbelief routine is a complete waste of time. But the protracted interludes at Williamstown are more subtly subversive: they feel like operatic intervals at Glyndebourne or Salzburg and in equally pleasant surroundings. At Glyndebourne, breaking for a ninety-minute black-tie hampers-with-champers picnic on the lawns of a stately home in the middle of Mozart or Verdi doesn't seem to rupture the main event: the show and the socializing have the measure of each other—both heightened and ornate—and the primal nature of opera is such that the drama reasserts itself at full force very easily after even the longest interval. The placid colonial agreeability of Williamstown has a different pull: the longer the intermission lasts the more the preceding act seems small and silly, and by the end the always problematic third act is even more irritating than usual.

Still, in this age of parsimonious production, Landwehr's sets are stunningly generous: Coward's triangle is plotted geometrically through three acts at three different points on the socio-economic ladder

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in three different cities, and this production rises effortlessly to each challenge, each new setting ever more luxurious and ever more thrilling—an evocative bohemian garret in Paris, a chintzy flat in Mayfair, a penthouse in Manhattan, all extending to the rafters of the main stage at the handsome Adams Memorial Theatre. Landwehr's sets remind us that, as often as not, love isn't just a question of surrendering to one individual, but surrendering to the confines of his world, too. In this production, all three environments are precise and evocative: you'd love to live in all of them, but you have to choose. Unfortunately, the performances going on down below on the boards are, for the most part, not quite the size of the sets. This *Design for Living* is heavy on the design, not much room for living.

Coward spells out the situation straightforwardly enough. As Leo tells Gilda, "The actual facts are so simple. I love you. You love me. You love Otto. I love Otto. Otto loves you. Otto loves me. There now! Start to unravel from there." It doesn't unravel so much as re-knot itself: Gilda moves from Otto the painter to Leo the writer and back again, embraces conventional marriage and a conventional husband (Ernest) and then abandons him for both the other fellows, and the three of them decide to hell with the conventional world. They can afford to do so, of course, because they're not bank clerks or grocers but artists, after a fashion, and sufficiently acquainted with success that they can afford to be blasé about it:

> Leo (reading *The Daily Mirror*): "*Change and Decay* is gripping throughout. The characterization falters here and there, but the dialogue is polished and sustains a high level from first to last and is frequently witty, nay, even brilliant—
>
> Gilda: I love "nay."
>
> Leo: "But"—here we go, dear! "But the play, on the whole, is decidedly thin."
>
> Gilda: My God! They've noticed it.
>
> Leo (jumping up): Thin—thin! What do they mean, "Thin"?
>
> Gilda: Just thin, darling. Thin's thin all over the world and you can't get away from it.
>
> Leo: Would you call it thin?
>
> Gilda: Emaciated.

Very Noel Coward, as they say. Coward is the essence of theater because his currency is charm, the most elusive of qualities. If your players can't charm, his characters are snotty, hollow, and self-absorbed. In his best work, Coward seemed to understand that his great gift was in being able to glide across the surface of life and find depth in the shallows. By contrast, when he tried consciously to be deep, he was embarrassingly shallow. That's where the third act runs into trouble: a world of frivolous hedonism can be attractive if you show it, but not if you preach it; as *Design for Living* grinds to its close, Coward comes perilously near to a Jazz Age version of those latterday bores noisily declaiming the merits of "alternative family structures." It was not produced in the West End until 1939, six years after its Broadway premiere, and what a difference half a decade makes: the play's sermonizing seemed not just self-absorbed but obnoxious, and seriously out of tune with the times. It was, declared *The Observer*, "a hangover from the twittering Twenties." Peter Hall's revival last year in England is the only production I've seen that managed to stop the final act souring what went before.

Speaking of alternative lifestyles, *Design* is also one of those Coward works seized on by those tediously obsessed with the not terribly interesting fact that Coward was homosexual. For a while, the preoccupation of directors with the alleged homoerotic subtext all but buried the actual text, and no production was complete without a chorus of "Mad about the Boy" at intermission. Coward, a discreet old queen, would have found all this at best silly and at worst revolting (he loathed the gay scene, and dismissed Fire Island as "sick sick sick"). The absolute nadir was Scott Elliott's 1996 vulgarization of *Private Lives*, in which he

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destroyed one of Coward's best moments: the beautifully written "Albert Hall" scene, whose accumulation of banalities builds to a palpable erotic charge. Instead of playing the text, Elliott had Caroline Seymour hump (there's no other word) Frank Langella throughout the exchange. But almost as disastrous was Joe Mantello's exhaustingly gay 2001 Roundabout revival of *Design for Living* with Alan Cumming horribly miscast as a screamingly homosexual Otto. Both revivals were the most explicit betrayal of Coward, the font of an entire school of acting predicated on the coolness of concealment. (This isn't quite the same as the film version of *Design for Living*, in which Gary Cooper doesn't seem to have a clue what the movie's about.)

Of these two potential pitfalls—gaying it up and third act sermonizing—Gregory Boyd's Williamstown revival avoids one: Boyd plays it straight, remarkably so. Are Otto and Leo rather more than fond friends when Gilda's not around? That's up to you, but Boyd doesn't insist on it, and nor does the play. John Lahr, in *Coward the Playwright*, summed up *Design* as "the homosexual daydream of sexual abundance," which isn't quite right: it's more to do with the chimera of group intimacy, not in the mechanical meaning of three-in-a-bed sex romps but in the sense that Coward as a homosexual man felt he could enjoy relationships with women at least as intense as those they had with their husbands. (Gertrude Lawrence is the obvious example.)

Whether or not this was true in life, it doesn't appear so in the play: "We're all of a piece, the three of us," says Gilda, but in fact the trio rarely functions as a unified front; instead, there are different permutations of twosomes, with the third member relegated to outsider. Coward had been friends with the Lunts since the days when "over potato salad and dill pickles" they shared their dreams of fame and fortune. Among all their plans was Coward's promise to write a play for them "when all three of us had become stars of sufficient magnitude to be able to count upon an individual following irrespective of each other." In 1932, that condition having been achieved, he wrote *Design for Living*.

That's the obvious flaw in Boyd's casting: Campbell Scott as Otto, Steven Weber as Leo, and Marisa Tomei as Gilda. Campbell Scott is the son of George C. Scott and Colleen Dewhurst and has been an actor, director, and producer in steady work without ever swimming in public focus. Weber is a fine actor whose face you recognize from movies but can't quite put a name to. And Marisa Tomei had an Oscar-winning turn as the foul-mouthed girlfriend in *My Cousin Vinny*, but fell victim to the Best Supporting Actress curse and hasn't managed to build on that breakout role. Comparing the totality of their CVs, each is roughly the equal of the others, but you get the feeling Miss Tomei has been cast because she's a star name. I can't understand why anyone would go see a play because it's got someone who won a Best Supporting Oscar a decade ago, but theatrical managements can't afford to pick and choose these days, even in limited summer runs.

The problem is that Miss Tomei isn't much good. Each of the trio seems to have conceived his or her strategy in isolation from the others: Scott gives a Lunt-sized performance, which in most circumstances is difficult to do unless you're a genuinely big star secure in your starriness. But Scott's Otto is suave, droll, crisp, and commanding. Weber ignores the obvious autobiographical elements in Leo, eschewing Coward impersonation for Wodehousian upper-class Brit-twittery. I didn't care for this myself, but everybody else seemed to, though when a belch gets the biggest laugh of the night in a Coward comedy you know something's gone awry. ("Awry" is a wonderful Coward word, by the way: His entire reputation could rest on one tenderly literate line from "I'll See You Again"—"Though my world may go awry." "That's lovely," Tom Lehrer once said to me. "What other songwriter of the time would use a word like that?")

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But Marisa Tomei doesn't seem to have any grip on Gilda. Her notion of interpretation stops at a variable accent aspiring in the course of the evening to both Hepburns, Katherine and Audrey, without quite getting there. I think Kate's the one she's meant to be aiming for, given the big wide Hepburn weekend-in-Greenwich pants she's lowered into for much of the play. Miss Tomei is lovely to look at, but the clothes seem to swallow her: she can wear Hepburn's trousers but can't fill them. And a play about triangular attractions inevitably gets thrown off balance if one leg's coming up short.

Coward takes the old rule about starting your story as late as possible to extremes. Act One plunges us immediately into Otto and Leo's mutual hostility, so when the boys show up in Act Three and seduce Gilda away from her Ernest marriage by stirring her heart with happy memories of good times, we cannot share that memory because we've never seen the good times. Coward could have shown us easily enough, but decided that with him and the Lunts he needn't bother. All three were more than capable of conveying that these characters had lives they lived before the curtain went up. You don't get that sense of independent existence with any of the principals here except Campbell Scott, and Miss Tomei never really gets beyond an impersonation of a caricature of what she thinks a Noel Coward character should be. Not only is it difficult to believe her Gilda lived and breathed before the start of Act One, she crumbles to nothing during the intermissions. The voice, the intonation, the accent —very important with Coward, because it's a comic rhythm: it's the key the play sings in, and at Williamstown not everyone finds it. You shouldn't overdo the smartness, and Coward felt Gilda, in particular, ought to be "a bit common." In Peter Hall's production, Janie Dee played Gilda down to earth and rung more laughs than usual even with some of the lamer lines. Here, most of Gilda's best shots generate little more than the forced laughter of a sympathetic audience trying to will a performance out of an uncooperative actor.

Williamstown is often a mix of glittery revivals and grimy premieres, as if the pleasure of a Noel Coward has to be paid for by a slab of something dour and cheerless. Michael John LaChiusa is a fairly reliable filler of that grim bill. Many of us have yet to forgive him for what he did to *The Wild Party* on Broadway a couple of seasons back. But, for no good reason, he seems to be the American theater's busiest composer, and here he is back with a new "work in progress" that, a year or two down the line, will open on Broadway, get rave reviews and fizzle out in a short unprofitable run. This time round, the project is *R shomon*. That's not a typing error. LaChiusa transplants *Rashomon*—or, more precisely, some of the Akutagawa stories that inspired the film—to New York, where Kurosawa's picture is playing but the "A" has fallen off the marquee. One lost letter doesn't seem that big a deal, but it encapsulates the annoying clever-cleverness of LaChiusa. This time round, in his ongoing quest to write a moneylosing snob hit in every conceivable format, he's got two one-act plays interrupted by a third in two halves. The first act, *R shomon* itself, is a relatively straightforward adaptation set at the time of the movie's New York premiere in 1951. As in the film, we see the same crime re-enacted from the perspective of each character, as we come to accept that there is no absolute truth. In this version, Williamstown gives us its second triangle of the summer season: a thief, a pinstriped businessman, his trophy wife. The punk lures the exec and his cold-blooded hottie to Central Park, where she winds up raped and he winds up dead. We come to understand the event through the different tellings—the thief's, the wife's, the dead man's, and the witness's. This time, the witness is not a woodcutter, but the janitor at the movie theater where *Rashomon* is playing.

I can't say I'm sympathetic to the notion that truth is merely a matter of point of

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view. In LaChiusa's hands, it sounds suspiciously like the smug moral equivalence of the 9/11 left: there's no good, no evil, one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter, etc. And sure enough, in Act Two, *Gloryday* transplants Akutagawa's "The Dragon" to the aftermath of 9/11 and a priest's loss of faith. His new doubt leads him to announce a miracle scheduled for Central Park at a particular time. The question is whether or not the miracle will show up. Split in two and opening each of the two acts is a third Central Park yarn, *Kesa and Morito*, whose transposition from ninth-century Japan seems very creaky but which is the most compelling musically.

So LaChiusa has taken three Japanese stories, updated and transferred them to Central Park, setting one near the theater at which the movie on which it's based is playing, making another a 9/11 drama, cleaving the third in two parts as curtain-raisers for the others, and turning all of them into musicals, even though much of the material doesn't obviously sing. The self-conscious complexity of the exercise seems an elaborate evasion even by LaChiusa's standards. The most potentially promising material musically is *Rashomon* itself: the best way to convey its multiple versions of the same incident is through different musical voices for each character. But LaChiusa makes Sondheim sound like Frank Loesser. His default mode is ersatz-art song on which he layers various nods to jazz, rock, calypso, and traditional Japanese music. Audra McDonald, unmiked, sings much of the score ravishingly, but none of it sounds like anything other than the composer's own pretensions. Considering that LaChiusa's transformed Akutagawa's characters into a prime slice of Jim Thompson, their warblings are distractingly bloodless. If LaChiusa is the future of American musical theater, we might as well demolish half the Broadway houses now.

The Williamstown Festival marked its half-century this summer with a farewell to its old home, the Adams Memorial Theatre. Next year a new auditorium will take its place, for reasons best known to the management. If it had to go, Nicholas Martin's warm, indulgent production of *A Midsummer Night's Dream* is the way to sign off. This production has plenty of strong performances, including Jeremy Shamos as Bottom (whistling a happy tune through the woods) and Andrea Martin as a transvestite Robin Starveling. But its love story is not Titania and Oberon or Hermia and Lysander but the players and their old home. Martin's production turns the Adams into an enchanted land and sparks the magic one last time. I'll miss it. Even when the shows were failures, I always loved the theater.

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Art

"Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!"

by Karen Wilkin

Some time ago, I was introduced to a very interesting and engaging man, a sort of modern-day Lorenzo de' Medici, who, like his distinguished Florentine predecessor, is an accomplished (and published) poet, a major supporter of poetry, a force in the world of international finance, and a passionate, eclectic collector of recent art. Curious about his choice of artists, I asked "Why do you collect?" Since the poet-financier's manner is notably modest, even shy, I was a little surprised when he replied "Arrogance. I believe my taste is better than anyone else's and I have the means to prove it." My surprise quickly changed to admiration. What better description of the dedicated collector's motivation?

I thought of this conversation as I made my way through "'Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!': The Bruyas Collection from the Musée Fabre, Montpellier," the summer exhibition at the Clark Institute.[1] The title refers to the nickname of one of the best known and, in its day, controversial works in the collection, otherwise known as *The Meeting*—Gustave Courbet's 1854 tribute to his sometime friend and patron, Alfred Bruyas, presented as an encounter between the two men (and Bruyas's servant) at a Montpellier crossroads. It's a stunning, peculiar picture, as remarkable for its light-drenched landscape as for the unnerving relationship of its protagonists. *The Meeting*—not to mention Bruyas's eight other spectacular Courbets, some choice Delacroix, and a dazzling, disquieting Géricault—are reason enough to visit Williamstown and to buy the informative, handsome catalogue.

But the collection also includes a great many works by artists familiar mainly to specialists in the period. The contrast between stellar paintings by some of the nineteenth century's most adventurous innovators and undeniably accomplished but often pedestrian efforts by their conservative contemporaries is so acute that it makes you wonder about the man who selected (and often commissioned) this diverse assembly—which is why I remembered the poet-financier-collector's disarming remark. In addition to their shared eclecticism of taste, everything suggests that for Bruyas, too, arrogance played a part in why he collected, although he probably wouldn't have admitted it; certainly arrogance was a factor in how he conceived of his function as a collector. I suspect that unlike the un-

1 "'Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!': The Bruyas Collection from the Musée Fabre, Montpellier" opened at the Sterling and Francine Clark Art Institute, Williamstown, Massachusetts, on June 27 and remains on view through September 6, 2004. The exhibition was previously on view at the Virginia Museum of Fine Arts, Richmond (March 26–June 13, 2004). It will next be seen at the Dallas Museum of Art (October 17, 2004–January 2, 2005) and at the Fine Arts Museums of San Francisco (January 22–April 3, 2005). A catalogue of the exhibition has been published by Yale University Press (255 pages, $60).

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assuming poet-financier-collector, Bruyas probably couldn't have been described as modest or shy, if his fondness for commissioning portraits of himself from the artists who interested him is a reliable indicator.

At the Clark, one of these portraits, painted by Alexandre Cabanel in 1846, introduces us to a serious young man of twenty-four whose distinctive features will soon become familiar. Cabanel viewed his subject through the filter of his admiration for the half-length portraits Ingres produced in Italy, posing Bruyas on a terrace edged by a classical molding, against a distant Italian landscape, and turning him, with his long, narrow nose, sober expression, and red hair and silky red beard, into a paragon of neoclassical symmetry and clarity. Apart from a rather flamboyantly tied striped cravat, Bruyas looks correct, self-contained. Nothing, except the setting, suggests that this proper young *bourgeois* rebelled against his background to study painting with the Montpellier artist Charles Matet or that he fled to Italy to avoid going into the family banking business. He later reconciled with his father and inherited a considerable fortune, but at the time that he sat for the portrait, Bruyas was spending his time as an art groupie with the young Rome Prize winners at the French Academy. His entrée to this rarefied aesthetic circle was probably Cabanel, a fellow native of Montpellier, whom he knew from Matet's studio.

From one point of view, Cabanel's severe portrait—and the trio of Ingres-inflected figures with Italian themes that Bruyas commissioned from him at about the same time—are merely textbook examples of what a gifted, ambitious, and officially anointed young painter would produce after a thorough academic training and months of careful study of Roman antiquities and Raphael. What is more interesting is that this group of works also signals Bruyas's discovery of himself not as artist, but as collector. Even before coming to Rome, he had purchased works by Montpellier artists, including his teacher, Matet, and he had met a good many painters on his annual trips to a spa in the Pyrenees, in quest of treatment for his poor health. Yet, commissioning work from Cabanel seems to have set Bruyas on a new path. He began to think of himself less as a consumer of art than as a collaborator, believing that by sponsoring and acquiring the work of those artists he considered to be the best of his own time, he could free them from the constraints of pleasing Salon juries and other officialdom—never mind that Cabanel was already embarked on the road to an "official" career, as a *pensionnaire* at the state-supported Academy at the Villa Medici. Bruyas's aim, he wrote, was to encourage contemporary art by allowing it to "ground itself and grow in liberty." And he wanted to befriend artists, to have a privileged choice of their work, to spend time with them, and to have his ideas (and often his image) reflected in what they did—to be, in short, the nineteenth-century equivalent of a player and tastemaker.

It sounds familiar. We've all met current versions of Bruyas, even some with similarly high-minded intentions, at the celebratory dinners after openings. Present-day museum boards court them, although few can aspire to have an entire wing dedicated to their holdings, as Bruyas did when he donated his collection to the Musée Fabre. The irony is that the artists Bruyas supported were, as a rule, anything but anti-establishment. His friend Cabanel, for example, ended up as one of the most acclaimed Academic Pooh-Bahs of France. (The exhibition's fierce self-portrait by Cabanel, painted in 1852, all dramatic light and furrowed brow, simultaneously bears witness to his discovery of Titian, to his formidable technical accomplishments, and to the self-confidence that made him one of France's leading official artists under the patronage of Napoleon III.)

The great exception to this conservative bent was, of course, Courbet. If the young Bruyas saw himself as a new kind of collector, Courbet invented a new way of being a painter. The two were almost exact coevals; Bruyas was born in 1821 and died in 1876; Courbet, two years older, outlived his patron

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by only a year. They met after Bruyas did something astonishing—he purchased two of the three Courbets accepted at the Salon of 1853: the sensual, unidealized *Sleeping Spinner* (1853), and the ferocious, shocking *Bathers* of the same year, both monuments to the painter's doctrine of unembellished fact. Buying *The Bathers*—possibly the meatiest, fleshiest back and backside in the history of art—may have been the most audacious thing Bruyas ever did, apart from running off to Italy instead of becoming a banker. The picture provoked the press to almost as much outraged speculation about the morals of the ample nude as Manet's *Olympia* did a decade later, the sheer, insistent presence of those extraordinary buttocks apparently overriding all awareness of the ravishingly painted landscape, the histrionic gestures of the two women, or, for that matter, the uneasy marriage of figures clearly painted in the studio and an outdoor setting. It was too much even for the usually perceptive Delacroix, who wrote in his journal "The vulgarity of the forms would not signify, the vulgarity and futility of the idea is what is so abominable, and even that might pass if the idea (such as it is) had been made clear. But what is it supposed to mean?" (He acknowledged the excellence of the landscape but thought the water a mere puddle.) For a while, Bruyas's amazing boldness in acquiring this difficult, scandalous picture promised to transform both his and Courbet's life. For starters, the painter and his admirer excitedly discovered that they shared many ideas about the role of art in society.

The early 1850s, when Bruyas and Courbet met, was a crucial period in the evolution of art and the art world in France. The Academy and the Salon still mattered, and a successful artist's career was still based on the time-honored system of training at the Academy, official exhibitions, and competition for prizes and state patronage. If Courbet's canon of Realism—his conviction that art should be a truthful rendering of experience, rather than an idealized invention tempered by classical formulae—was at odds with Academic principles, his ideas about conducting a career were even more removed from normal practice. He began conventionally enough, submitting works to the Salon and even winning a gold medal, but he soon devoted his attention to garnering notoriety and publicity instead of traditional awards. Eventually, Courbet abandoned the Salon and official exhibitions completely, and mounted his own shows.

In the early days of their friendship, Bruyas and Courbet saw themselves as two halves of a formula to achieve a common goal: "to advance the social and moral mission of contemporary art" through "the support of living artists by private capital," as the exhibition catalogue succinctly puts it. Courbet was the living artist; Bruyas would provide the capital. A sympathetic portrait of a nervy, introspective Bruyas, painted soon after the two men met, inaugurated their enterprise. It's an unsettling image; Bruyas looks distinctly uncomfortable, his pale face and red beard luminous against a dark ground, one thin, veiny hand with an antique signet ring clenched in the foreground. The large, ambitious double portrait, *The Meeting ("Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet!")*, was painted the following year, in 1854, as an emblem of their future collaboration, imagined as a chance meeting in the countryside, bathed in the brilliant light of the Southern sun. (Visiting Montpellier is thought to have led Courbet to brighten his palette permanently.) Bruyas stands alert and erect in the center, an elegant country gentleman with a stick and a coat with a striped collar. He seems a little withdrawn and fragile—not surprisingly, given his frail health—but he doffs his hat to Courbet; behind him, a servant bows deferentially. The painter, emanating robust well-being, in shirtsleeves, trousers tucked into his spats and folding easel strapped to his back, faces his patron. There is no sign of deference. Courbet's hat is in his hand, but he seems simply to be holding it, not to have snatched it off out of politeness; his chin, with its emphatic black beard, is proudly lifted. What proved most problematic to viewers at the

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time is that the painter is much larger than his patron, far more than might be justified by their relative positions in space or in society. And as everyone quickly noticed, only Courbet casts a shadow. The figures are broadly and economically painted, the landscape is a triumph of evocative, loose, energetic brushwork, and the light palpable, but most critics of the period chose to notice only the discrepancy between the two main characters and ridiculed the picture. Bruyas, whose ego was apparently a match for Courbet's, felt that he had not received his due as patron, and the close relationship between the "collaborators" was never the same. (An unflattering, thinly disguised portrayal of the collector in a satirical article by one of Courbet's friends didn't help either.)

To his credit, Bruyas bought another work by Courbet after their falling out—a superb landscape, *Solitude (The Covered Stream)* (1866), whose roughly painted geometric gray rocks, slender tree trunks, and masses of modulated green foliage point directly to Cézanne—but he otherwise seems to have backed away from supporting the vanguard. Even though he lived until 1876, Bruyas ignored Impressionism. When, in the 1860s, the young Frédéric Bazille was introduced to the self-proclaimed champion of living artists by his father, he tried to interest him in the impoverished Monet, who was then painting brilliant seaside views at Saint-Adresse, but Bruyas was uninterested. He concentrated on conventional works by recognized artists and, after donating the bulk of his collection to the Musée Fabre, focused on filling holes in the selection, consciously working to assemble a broad (but as it turned out, incomplete) overview of the living artists of his day that eventually joined and supplemented his original donation.

The story told by the exhibition at the Clark is fascinating and tells us a good deal about the role of the collector in the mid-nineteenth century, but in the end, the most compelling aspect of the show is the opportunity to see a group of superb Courbets encompassing all but the last decade of his career. The startling, youthful self-portrait, *Man with a Pipe* (1846–1847), is there, a masterpiece of forthright paint handling, dramatic lighting, and unabashed self-love; the hollow-cheeked painter stares at himself, eyes half shut and so heavily in shadow that the image seems to deny the possibility of the act of looking that it presumably records. Courbet lavishes attention on his full, shapely lips. Realism struggles with Romanticism, while the open collar, the blue-green v-necked jacket, and the rampant self-absorption wrench the picture into our own century. The slightly later *Self-Portrait with a Striped Collar* (1854) is no less narcissistic, but Courbet paints himself turned away, almost in profile, as he does in *The Meeting* and in *The Painter's Studio* (1855, Musée d'Orsay, Paris). Oddly, in both the self-portrait and *The Painter's Studio*, Courbet gives himself the striped-collared coat that he gave to Bruyas in *The Meeting*, implying either intimacy or equality—or simply the need to lighten a passage near the head. A little seascape, painted during Courbet's sojourn in Montpellier, is an exercise in chutzpa, both because of the way he reduces a great expanse of Mediterranean to a few broad brushstrokes and because of the assured gesture of the agile little figure saluting the sea. (The catalogue suggests that he was intended as Bruyas, as an acknowledgment of his importance.) A solid, broadly painted, early portrait of Baudelaire, distinguished mainly by its glowing salmon reds and reddish browns, completes the group.

If the Courbets are the meat of show, the best of the Delacroix are superb side dishes. At one end of the spectrum, there's the rousing *Moroccan Military Exercises* (1832), the first major oil inspired by the painter's seminal trip to North Africa, a feast of rearing horses and flying drapery, evoked by muscular drawing and rapid brushwork. At the other end is an intimate watercolor of a bunch of flowers. In between is one of the jewels of Bruyas's collection, *Women of Algiers in their Apartment* (1849), smaller, but no less seductive than Delacroix's first sublime version of the theme, now in the

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Grande Galerie of the Louvre. Everything is bathed in golden, dusty light and liquid shadow; pinks, creams, and dull greens thread across the canvas, through the women's opulent, exotic clothing; everything is framed by the tall silhouette of the dark-clad servant, who reveals the scene by pushing back a curtain. Voluptuous indolence is embodied as color. A couple of watercolor-embellished drawings related to the image are equally delectable. The other standout in this group is Delacroix's austere, sensitive portrait of Bruyas (of course), the only image of the collector at the Clark that suggests the lifetime of pain and suffering that he apparently endured.

There are treats throughout the selection, some disappointments, and some surprises. Among the treats: a direct, forthright Thomas Couture portrait of guess who that is better than you'd expect from this pillar of the French art establishment. Bruyas appears more alert and vigorous than he does in the sleek Cabanel portrait or in Delacroix's sympathetic one; Couture downplays the red hair and emphasizes the elegant aquiline nose, while forceful brushwork toughens the surface. There are excellent works on paper by members of the Barbizon School, although it was hardly adventurous to have bought them in the 1870s. Disappointments? The Corots are less than riveting, although the Millet, a small mythological scene, is atypical and minor, but nicely painted. Among the surprises: *The Wrath of Achilles*, 1847, by one Léon Benouville, celebrated during his brief lifetime, we are told, for bringing "a forceful realism to the austere vocabulary of French classicism." Maybe. The full-frontal nude at the Clark gets my vote for silliest picture in the collection; Achilles, far from appearing wrathful, seems to be wondering where he put his trousers. The best surprise and possibly the most unforgettable picture: Géricault's gorgeously painted, glowing *Study of a Severed Arm and Legs* (1818–1819)—a warm-up for the *Raft of the Medusa*—a painting of exquisite tenderness despite its gory subject, in which a lifeless hand and two feet become a near-abstract arrangement of eloquent, economically rendered forms.

It's irresistible to speculate about what might have happened if Bruyas and Courbet hadn't clashed, although for two such arrogant temperaments, conflict was probably inevitable, if not over *The Meeting*, then over something else. An alternative relationship between artist and patron is depicted in *The Painter's Studio* (1853), by the genre painter Octave Tassaert, commissioned by Bruyas the year he met Courbet. Tassaert presents Bruyas front and center, seated at the easel, in an interior hung with works by the artist in his collection; the painter, holding his palette, sits behind his patron-collaborator, his face invisible, as he turns to look at Bruyas and to be inspired by his ideas. It's a long way from Courbet's meeting of peers in *"Bonjour, Monsieur Courbet."* A year after painting that problematic image, Courbet included Bruyas among the people significant to him, in his version of *The Painter's Studio*, but there is absolutely no ambiguity about who sits at the easel and wields the brushes in front of the landscape at the center of this great autobiographical monument. Would anything have changed had Courbet placed Bruyas more prominently in *The Painter's Studio* or *The Meeting*? Not really, I suspect. Tassaert may have gratified his benefactor's wish to be portrayed as the painter's equal or even his superior, but he remains a minor figure. Bruyas's fame is bound up not with this image, but with one that he felt diminished his importance—because, of course, it was by the truculent genius, Courbet. Courbet's brilliance assured Bruyas's reputation. Poor Tassaert, as the exhibition at the Clark makes clear, is interesting primarily because of his connection with Bruyas, the man who was Courbet's patron.

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Seurat's "Sunday" painting

by Hilton Kramer

The career of the nineteenth-century French painter Georges Seurat was lamentably short; he died in 1891 at the age of thirty-one, five years after completing his most celebrated achievement—*A Sunday on the Grande Jatte* (1884–1886). Yet he undoubtedly changed the course of Western art. For that remarkable feat, he wasn't always praised, however. Even for those of us who have long been inured to the idiocies that were heaped upon the heads of the Impressionist and Post-Impressionist painters in the heyday of their achievements, some of the criticisms directed at Seurat's masterwork are still astounding.

Here is Joris-Karl Huysmans, writing in *La Revue indépendante* in 1887:

> Strip his figures of the colored fleas with which they are covered, and underneath there is nothing, no soul, no thought, nothing. Nothingness in a body of which only the contour exists. Thus in his pictures of the *Grande Jatte* the human armature becomes rigid and hard; everything is immobilized and congealed.

To which he added: "I am decidedly afraid that there is only too much process, too many systems here, and not enough of the flame that ignites, not enough life!"

A younger, now forgotten critic, Emile Hennequin, while praising some of Seurat's seascapes, came down pretty hard, too, on *Grande Jatte*:

> When Monsieur Seurat uses his method to paint Norman seascapes, especially as in that marvelous canvas entitled *Grandcamp*, when he describes the grey arrival of evening, he is excellent. But if, as in the *Grande Jatte*, he attacks the problem of sunlight and the fading figure, he is glaringly unsuccessful, not only because of the absence of light but because of the absence of life in these figures whose outlines have painstakingly filled in with colored dots as in a tapestry. They are painted Gobelin tapestries, as unpleasant as the originals.

Yet, fortunately for Seurat, he found in a much more perceptive critic—Félix Fénéon—a champion who instantly understood and admired both the radicalism of his technique and the significance of his subject in the *Grande Jatte* when the painting was first shown to the public in the Eighth Impressionist Exhibition in Paris in 1886. This is how Fénéon described it on that occasion:

> It is four o'clock on Sunday afternoon in the dog-days. On the river the swift barks dart to and fro. On the island itself, a Sunday population has come together at random, and from a delight in the fresh air, among the trees, Seurat has treated his forty or so figures in summary and hieratic style, setting them up frontally or with their backs to us or in profile, seated at right-angles, stretched out horizontally, or bolt upright: like a Puvis de Chavannes gone modern.

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It was Pissarro, however, who secured a place for Seurat's shocking work in this fateful exhibition, and then underscored his admiration for the younger Seurat by adopting his controversial pointillist technique in his own painting, thus setting in motion a pictorial influence that has rarely been absent from modern painting ever since.

We have lately been reminded of all this in the splendid exhibition called *Seurat and the Making of "La Grande Jatte"* at the Art Institute of Chicago,[1] where Seurat's masterpiece has been a prized feature of the permanent collection since 1926. The exhibition itself is a virtual cornucopia of drawings and oil studies related to the *Grande Jatte*, and its weighty catalogue, with lengthy texts by Robert L. Herbert and others, is encyclopedic in the detail it devotes to Seurat and the emergence of the Neo-Impressionist movement. So much so, indeed, that some of the longueurs lavished upon Paul Signac and sundry other secondary figures are likely to try the patience of readers who are not specialists in the subject.

About what has often struck me as an important feature of the *Grande Jatte*—the deadpan humor to be seen in the depiction of so many of the painting's figures—there is curiously little serious discussion. I've seen people actually laugh out loud on their first encounter with the *Grande Jatte*, and among the visitors I observed in the Art Institute there were many with wide smiles on their faces. Yet, the only reference to comedy that I can recall in Mr. Herbert's text occurs in a quotation from Meyer Shapiro's well-known essay on Seurat in which Seurat is said to have been "drawn to the comic as a mechanization of the human (or perhaps as a relief from the mechanical)." The most Mr. Herbert will grant Seurat in this matter is an "irony and bemused wit," which doesn't really account for Seurat's spirited comedy.

At the same time, far too much is made of Seurat as a social critic. Owing to the influence of two Marxist art historians, Linda Nochlin and T. J. Clark, Seurat has in recent years been transformed, if only in academic circles, into some sort of political radical, and many students are now taught to regard the *Grande Jatte*, *The Circus*, and other major paintings as political allegories. I have written about this subject once before in these pages; I will cite here one brief reference to Professor Nochlin from that earlier essay:

> Taking her cue from some remarks by the German Marxist writer Ernst Bloch, who described the scene depicted in *La Grande Jatte* as an example of what he called "landscapes of painted suicide"—Bloch even characterized the boats on the river in this painting as "belong[ing] more to Hades than to a Sunday"—Professor Nochlin says of Seurat that "he is the only one [of the Post-Impressionists] to inscribe the modern condition itself—with its alienation, anomie, the experience of living in a society of the spectacle, of making a living in a market economy," etc.[2]

Now the only thing we actually know about Seurat and politics is that some of his friends—Fénéon and Pissarro, among them—were anarchists. That a vaguely anarchist sentiment may have influenced Seurat's satirical treatment of the bourgeois figures in the *Grande Jatte* is certainly plausible. But this is hardly sufficient reason to define the *Grande Jatte* as an "anti-utopian allegory." But then, Professor Nochlin doesn't hesitate to tell us that Seurat's *Circus* reminds her of "Hitler and the crowd at Nuremberg, or, more recently, the American electorate and performer-candidates who mouthed slogans and gesticulated with practiced artistry on television." I think the smiles on the faces of the visitors to the exhibition in Chicago are more to be trusted than the critics who see red in everything they look at.

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1 *Seurat and the Making of "La Grande Jatte"* at the Art Institute of Chicago (June 16–September 19).

2 "Seurat, One Hundred Years Later" (*The New Criterion*, June 1991). See also "T. J. Clark & the Marxist Critique of Modern Painting" (*The New Criterion*, March 1984).

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Music

Great conductors, the end

by Jay Nordlinger

I hadn't planned a same-time-next-year thing, but it has become that. For the past two Septembers, I've written about the mammoth series called *Great Conductors of the 20th Century*. This is the project superintended by IMG Artists that documents forty conductors in forty "volumes" of two CDs each. (Originally, the project was to have covered sixty conductors. But forty is plenty, really, especially if you are clinging to the conceit of "Great.") The series gives us every style, virtually every name, and reams of music. Frankly, this is one of the greatest recording projects in history.

In the previous two Septembers, I opted to discuss the lesser-known conductors: not Monteux, but André Cluytens; not Koussevitsky, but Nicolai Malko; not Ansermet, but Ataúlfo Argenta (the most obscure of the forty). But IMG's final batch of volumes contains only noted conductors, and I will deal—fairly briefly—with seven of these, in this third and final September.

Begin with Eduard van Beinum, the old Dutchman, though not as old as Willem Mengelberg, the man he succeeded as conductor of the Concertgebouw Orchestra of Amsterdam. Van Beinum got the job in 1945, when Mengelberg was judged guilty of "impermissible dealings with the Nazis." Van Beinum's own wartime conduct is not beyond reproach, but in any case he was much less prominent than Mengelberg.

The IMG discs show him with his home orchestra, and with the London Philharmonic, of which he was chief conductor for a few seasons. The first CD features Schubert's Symphony No. 6, in which van Beinum's musical intelligence is clear. Phrasing, in particular, is exemplary. The opening movement is covered in Schubertian warmth, but free of a sickly sweetness. And the Concertgebouw was a supremely royal instrument in the 1950s: rich-sounding.

The second movement—Andante—is both proper and sighingly Romantic. The third, a Scherzo, is one of the most beloved in Schubert—and happens to be a hard movement to get right. Van Beinum gets it unquestionably right. It bubbles along, and yet is not without muscle. As for the closing movement (Allegro moderato), it is graceful and spirited. Listening, you feel that you are in the company of a civilized man—van Beinum—who is presenting to you great music in the manner required. There is about this conductor an air of correctness, which is not to say that inspiration is absent.

Disc 1 continues with Brahms's Symphony No. 2, and one has the same feeling of being with a civilized man. He puts me in mind, actually, of Sir Adrian Boult, who excelled in this D-major symphony. Van Beinum's is a "live recording," and it is not technically perfect—but it has clinching virtues. The opening of the symphony takes you away, as in a dream, which is the aim—or certainly the effect—of the music. And the last movement (Allegro con spirito) is rhythmically joyous, by which I mean

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joyous in its rhythm. It is headlong but firmly controlled. The ending growls—actually growls—in a way seldom heard.

We come upon much different music in Disc 2, where we get Rimsky-Korsakov's *Sheherazade*. Van Beinum's is not a soakingly sensual account, but neither is it stodgily Dutch (if you will pardon the ethnic stereotype). The music shows plenty of thigh, but it is tasteful—unsluttish. And we are treated to really beautiful solos by the Concertgebouw concertmaster of the day (1956), Jan Damen.

Van Beinum had a sideline in English music, and IMG nods to this with a recording of the Elgar concert overture called *Cockaigne*. The performance is witty and eccentric, like the piece itself—also noble, also like the piece itself. The British chin is stuck out, but not arrogantly. Moreover, van Beinum exhibits a superb sense of orchestra management, with each section given its right say, and all of them in balance. The members of the London Philharmonic (in 1949) seem to be enjoying themselves to the hilt—as well they should.

Move now to Rudolf Kempe, widely acknowledged as major, but still underrated, in my opinion. His IMG volume is a bracing reminder of his greatness. Unusually, Kempe had been an oboist, a principal in the Leipzig Gewandhaus Orchestra. (When I say "unusually," I mean for a conductor; they tend to come from the ranks of string players and pianists.) Kempe began his conducting career in the opera houses—as used to be normal—and ascended to the podiums of the Zurich Tonhalle Orchestra and the Munich Philharmonic, among other bodies. He was known in particular for Beethoven and Strauss, but was an all-purpose conductor, as these discs indicate.

To begin with, he leads one of the better *Tragic Overtures* (Brahms) you'll ever hear: streamlined, focused, purposeful. Kempe knows his own mind, and is able to communicate his conception to an orchestra absolutely. (In the case of the *Tragic Overture*, the orchestra is the Berlin Philharmonic.) The piece builds excitingly, not knowing that it is thought hackneyed and boring.

The glory of Kempe, however, is seen in his traversal of Bruckner's Symphony No. 4, the "Romantic," with the Munich Philharmonic. (The year is 1972—a bad year for Munich.) Bruckner sounds important here, but he is neither heavy nor muddled. He is light and graceful, when he wants to be; and when he orders the famous "cathedrals of sound," they appear, in the sky. Like van Beinum (or perhaps more so), Kempe is a master of phrasing and balance. This is obvious especially in the second movement. He also knows the usefulness of pauses. And the great cries in the third movement have dramatic flair, demonstrating that Kempe, though intellectual, is not stiff.

The beginning of the fourth movement is portentous but not ponderous. It also *moves*. Kempe doesn't fancy that he is being profound; he knows that Bruckner is profound—but also passionate, intensely human! The suspense—the *piano* suspense—that Kempe generates toward the end is almost unbearable. There have been several towering exponents of Bruckner: Eugen Jochum, George Szell, Bernard Haitink (to name a living conductor). Kempe need take a backseat to no one.

Among the littler pieces in this volume is Wolf's *Italian Serenade*, which from Kempe is quirky, edgy, and newborn. When you first hear this piece, you figure it is a simple serenade, but then it catches you off guard. A serenade is given a Wolfian queering—and Kempe sees into this perfectly. His playing with tempo is marvelous, and his dynamics are daring (and just). Further, he gives proof that a big orchestra can sound plenty light—you don't need to strip down to some band, fashionable as that may be now.

The last item on these discs is Johann Strauss's *Leichtes Blut*, which one listens to in amazement: Kempe, a giant, is pure delight—and true feeling—in a frothy miniature. I have said before that this is one of the virtues of *Great Conductors of the 20th Century*: The monumental works, such as Bruckner's Symphony No. 4, are mixed with . . . say,

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Leichtes Blut. We are able to evaluate and appreciate conductors in an infinite variety.

Rafael Kubelik you well know, although I will remind you: the Czech conductor who fled his country after Communism came in 1948, who went on to lead the Chicago Symphony Orchestra (among others), and who returned to his homeland—now democratic—in 1990, before dying six years later. On that 1990 return, he conducted Smetana's *Má Vlast* (*My Country*) to open the Prague Spring Festival. A more satisfying concert could hardly be conceived for a movie.

Kubelik, like the others, was a versatile conductor, but IMG has certainly not neglected the Czech repertoire. Disc 1 begins with Dvořák's *Slavonic Rhapsody* in A-flat, a rarity (common as the composer is). This is not a work on which Dvořák would want his reputation to rest, but it is still Dvořák, and Kubelik handles it with undoubted understanding. Next comes the Symphony No. 4 of Bohuslav Martinů, a work this conductor loved. Would you love it too? Perhaps. It is a difficult piece to classify, stylistically, though I can tell you that it sometimes reminds me of Korngold or Zemlinsky (Korngold's teacher), Czechified. In any case, it will likely never have a better champion than Kubelik.

A two-and-a-half-minute work comes next—Berlioz's Dance of the Sylphs from *La Damnation de Faust*—all innocence and charm, followed by Mendelssohn's *Midsummer Night's Dream* Overture, which is unfortunately on the pedestrian side. Another work that Kubelik championed was Hindemith's *Symphonic Metamorphosis on Themes by Carl Maria von Weber*, which here is brilliantly and exotically effected. And did you know that Schumann wrote an opera? He did, *Genoveva*, and it is almost never performed, although sometimes you hear the overture, which Kubelik undertakes with the Berlin Philharmonic (1964). The overture borrows heavily from Beethoven—and Kubelik conducts it with sympathy and verve.

Schubert's Symphony No. 3—recorded with the Vienna Philharmonic in 1960—is palpably Austrian, its famous burbling last movement lovingly led. But the *pièce de résistance* comes in the form of Mahler's Symphony No. 10, or rather, the Adagio planned for it, which is all that truly remains of the symphony. Kubelik was one of the great Mahler men, and this Tenth—with the Bavarian Radio Symphony Orchestra—is transcendent. You feel, as it unfolds, that you are in the presence of something rare and holy. But Kubelik is not too much in awe of it: He conducts it boldly, and mercifully avoids the slows. The undulations are just right, in these tempi. With Kempe's Bruckner Fourth, Kubelik's Mahler Tenth is one of the peaks of the series.

His volume closes with more Czech music, this time Janáček's well-loved *Sinfonietta*.

About Sergiu Celibidache, the unconventional Romanian, reams have been written, and I do not propose to add much here. He is accorded his two discs, and they are stocked with odd items—odd items for an odd guy. There are standard works, yes: symphonies by Mozart, Mendelssohn, and Prokofiev, and some *Nutcracker* excerpts. But "Celi" is also shown in Franz Berwald, Hilding Rosenberg, and Heinz Tiessen. Those first two composers were Swedes, advocated by Celibidache in his Swedish period (he was conductor of the Swedish Radio Symphony Orchestra from 1962 to 1971); the third, a German, was his teacher and mentor.

From Berwald, we have the *Sinfonie singulière*, in which the conductor commands attention all through. He conducts the symphony as though it were a masterwork, and, through such care, it almost becomes one. I had a similar feeling when listening to Rosenberg's *Marionetter* Overture: Just as Celibidache could lift obscure orchestras—and he lifted many of them, in a peripatetic career—he could lift obscure (sometimes deservedly obscure) pieces. The Tiessen is his *Hamlet Suite*, and in Celibidache's performance, you can hear a good deal of that play itself. Celi goes deep into psychology. He is spellbinding, in music that is inherently less so. If one ever questioned Celibidache's wizardry—one wouldn't, after hearing this.

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I found him less effective in the standard items. His *Nutcracker* excerpts are unusually emphatic—and that is interesting—but they are also without much mirth or grace. In Prokofiev's Symphony No. 1 (the "Classical"), he is idiosyncratic—which he is expected to be, and which he cannot help being—but his (famous) slow tempos are altogether too slow: It is one thing to stop time in a Bruckner symphony, which Celi unforgettably did; it is another to stop time in the Prokofiev First. So too, the *Fledermaus* Overture is limp and turgid. A decent, but far from rousing, *Radetzky March* takes us out.

I said that I would not add much to the Celibidache commentary; I certainly don't wish to add much to the libraries written about Wilhelm Furtwängler and Arturo Toscanini, those antitheses. But I will say a quick word or two about their IMG volumes.

Furtwängler is shown in Beethoven, and only Beethoven: three symphonies, the Third, the Fifth, and the Ninth, the first of those with the Vienna Philharmonic, and the other two with the Berlin Philharmonic, all in live recordings, from 1953 (Munich), 1944 (Berlin), and 1937 (London). Furtwängler left many recordings of Beethoven symphonies—for example, recording the Fifth twelve times—and he is always worth listening to.

Why? Because, for one thing, he never conducted a symphony the same way twice, relying on inspiration, the leadings of the moment. The Fifth presented here is not my favorite Furtwängler Fifth, but it has its own, peculiar power (and we might reflect for a moment on Berlin '44). I believe that the second movement is much too slow—it is marked Andante *con moto* (my emphasis)—but it might also be described as "expansive." I would also say that the third movement is downright sluggish. But, but . . . the transition between the third and fourth movements is extraordinary, excruciating in the suspense it creates. Furtwängler always comes up with *something*—inspiration, indeed.

That final movement has a most unusual pulse, and the ending is one of the fastest on record (in both senses). I relate a rule about Furtwängler: His greatness is to be found in wholes, not details.

Mr. Toscanini did not neglect details. IMG shows him only in live recordings, with the NBC Orchestra (created for him in 1937). Those who love Toscanini will find much—everything—to love here. Those who disdain him will find nothing to love. Those who have mixed views of him will find themselves once again mixed.

The big works—I should really say the longer works—are the Brahms E-minor symphony and the Beethoven "Pastoral." The first of the smaller pieces is the Overture to *Les Francs-Juges* by Berlioz, whom Toscanini liked a lot (an overlooked fact). This performance has sternness and severity, two qualities not often associated with Berlioz, but very often associated with Toscanini. My own view is that Berlioz can often use some sternness and severity, though perhaps not this much. Later on, we have Dvořák's *Symphonic Variations*, a piece—like the *Slavonic Rhapsody* in A-flat—that is virtually unknown. Toscanini not only understands the variations' internal logic, he clearly relishes it. And it should go without saying that the orchestra plays immaculately for him. The great question, with this conductor, is whether the orchestra plays scared. The fear Toscanini often inspired was not always conducive to musical expression.

Disc 1 concludes with Puccini's little Intermezzo from *Manon Lescaut*. It spoke well of Toscanini that he loved Puccini, a composer whom the immature mock. That Intermezzo, however, might be played with more leniency, more giving in—more love. Some of the same might be said about the *Rienzi* Overture (Wagner), the work that begins Disc 2. It is imposing, grand, and correct, but also hampered by that tightness and fear. It is stifled, sort of choked. Toscanini might relax his fist a little—but, of course, we are dealing with a different nature. To his credit, the maestro hated Mussolini—but Mussolini might have con-

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ducted the *Rienzi* Overture this way. Yes, the trains run on time, but they're not very comfortable or enjoyable.

In the Immolation Scene, Helen Traubel is on a very short leash, but she sounds unbelievably heroic (if I may apply that term to a soprano). Then the discs conclude with a chorus and cavatina from Bellini's *Norma*—"Ite sul colle, o Druidi"—which is explosive and ennobling. Today's conductors, as they lead bel canto, could use more of this masculinity. Indeed, it is hard to believe that Bellini can be this way. And yet, the singers' invocation of the moon, and other things, is not all that mystical. Mystery is crushed by iron strength.

I wish to end our three Septembers with George Szell, whom many of us regard as an ideal. Like a number of these conductors, he started as a pianist-composer—Richard Strauss premiered one of Szell's pieces—and he always remained an excellent pianist (if not a composer). From 1946 to 1970, he led the Cleveland Orchestra, making it one of the greatest orchestral forces ever. He was a kind of high priest of music: a teacher, a model, a sage, the keeper of the tablets, a repository of musical wisdom.

He was known for the canonical repertory—Haydn, Mozart, Beethoven, Schubert, Schumann, Brahms, Wagner—but he ranged far and wide, and the IMG discs feature him in none of these composers (except Wagner, whose *Meistersinger* Prelude is here). Leading off, we have the humble *Fra Diavolo* Overture by Auber (Daniel Auber, not to be confused with Jacques Aubert, or Jacques Ibert!). As soon as that snare drum starts, boy, do you pay attention. You can almost see Szell glaring at you. What follows is a miracle of precision—Szell's usual miracle of precision—and yet the playing is not necessarily tight. The music isn't stifled, and the players aren't scared (noticeably). Furthermore, Szell lavishes everything he has on this little work, as he always did, on works high and low. Auber never had it so good.

And neither did Delius. Szell in Delius? Yes—and you can hear the English countryside, on a soft afternoon (the music is the *Irmelin Prelude*). Szell's reading has a matter-of-factness, an unhurriedness, and an understatement that is perfectly English. Also, it is sad and not-sad, in that curious English way. (Think of Holst, or Vaughan Williams, in addition to Delius.)

And talk about idiomatic! Rossini's overture to *L'Italiana in Algeri* is Rossini to the nth degree—supercharged, crackling, wildly disciplined. It is a revelation, in its very undaintiness. What does Szell think this is? The *Egmont* Overture? Yet some Beethoven in Rossini is not so bad. The sound and playing in this performance are extraordinarily full, but not—not at all—too thick. Much as we may love Tullio Serafin (the old, venerated Scala capo), Rossini does not get better than this; he is, in fact, practically apotheosized.

And how about Szell—the fearsome Dr. Szell—in *Delirien*, the Delirious Waltz, of Josef Strauss? Sure. It is utterly charming, but in a Szellian way: with plenty of discipline and heft, in addition to Viennesy bounce. Szell doesn't come down to the music; he brings it up, treats it as great. (This is a common trait of the best conductors—or musicians in general.) Szell believed that if you were going to do something, you had to do it right. The story is told that he once overheard his wife singing in the house. He said . . . well, just that: "Helene, if you're going to sing, you might as well sing correctly."

At present—an infant present—it doesn't look like the twenty-first century will be anything like as rich in conductors as the one just past. But music has a way of surprising you: You may get a flowering, when you least expect it. May we all live long enough to sniff some fresh blooms. In the meantime, however, at least we have this superb collection, a monument to musical excellence, and to traditions that we must hope are undying.

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The media

Smug self-righteousness

by James Bowman

In this election year, to be a voter watching the conversation between the media and the politicians—or, now that there are six times as many reporters as there are delegates at the party conventions, between the media and the media—is a bit like being an invalid who is forced to listen to his doctors and his relatives discussing what is to be done with him as if he were not in the room. Will the voters go for this? Will they be turned off by that? Hey, Doc? I'm right here! But the media, like the doctors and the relatives, think they know what's best for me, and my views on the subject would only be a distraction from the highly sophisticated process of ratiocination by which they have already discovered it. Why do I employ such highly trained professionals, after all, if I am only going to try to tell *them* what to think?

Thus, for all their complaint about the "scripted" conventions, and their cutting back on the coverage given to floor speeches, the media do not stint themselves of their opportunities for "analysis." In fact, the more scripted the convention, and therefore the more discounted its ostensible meanings, the more necessary it is for the media's expertise to inform us of what it all *really* means. "Yes, yes," says the doctor patronizingly, "of course we know you're impressed with Mr. Kerry's record of military service. We knew that by our scientific methods long before you yourself did. The real question is, when you come to cast your vote, will you remember this as the reason why you should vote for Mr. Kerry or will the convention's overall positive tone and suppression of so many Democrats' hatred of the President make you forget why you should vote against Mr. Bush? My learned colleagues and I all have our own theories about this, but pardon us if we point out that a lay person like yourself can hardly be in the best position to judge them."

Well, they have a point. Quite probably I haven't got the best vantage point for guessing what I'm likely to do or not do on election day. But then it is also true that the theoretician's trade has its own hazards, among which is the tendency to suffer from what was called in connection with the report of the 9/11 commission this summer "Groupthink." Take for instance the reaction in the media to the convention speech of John Edwards, the Democratic nominee for vice president. "Too nice for their own—and our—good" as the headline to Tom Shales's review in *The Washington Post* put it. It's still hard for me to get used to the idea of the paper's television critic reviewing political speeches as if they were dramatic performances, but that just goes to show you what a fuddy-duddy I am. Obviously they *are* performances and should be reviewed as such. And yet the grounds of Mr. Shales's assessment is not aesthetic after all, as the headline reveals, but political.

In other words, the basis on which Mr. Edwards's speech is judged "too nice" is,

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more or less avowedly, that it might lessen the ticket's chances of beating the incumbents in November and therefore will not be good either for them or for us. Or the world, Shales might have added. He decried what he called "the Democrats' namby-pamby decision to go positive—not to attack the arguably very, very vulnerable administration of George W. Bush." I love that "arguably." And so the appearance of "objectivity" is saved. Shales's anxiety about what he calls this "pall of niceness over the proceedings" was echoed by Peter Jennings on ABC, whose own political views are scarcely more opaque. Jennings asked ABC's political director Mark Halperin what he called "a tactical question," saying: "If John Edwards is going to go around the country talking enthusiastically, optimistically, even blithely about the Democratic Party, who's going to attack the President and Vice President Cheney?"

It takes a very special kind, a very *media* kind, of naïveté to worry about the danger that the incumbent administration might not be attacked enough in the year of MoveOn.org and *Fahrenheit 9/11*. It's the same kind of naïveté that kept mindlessly repeating the media consensus about that "nice" Mr. Edwards. Yet in the speech that all the experts agreed was too nice, Edwards had said that America's armed forces "deserve a president who understands . . . on the most personal level what they have gone through—what they have given and what they have given up for their country." Unlike, that is to say, certain presidents he could name—if he wasn't so unfortunately *nice*. "Edwards links Bush war record to Iraq body count" headlined *The Times* of London, presumably less influenced by the media consensus than American reporters and editors. Neither Shales nor Jennings, however, even noticed the insinuation of President Bush's callous indifference to the deaths of American soldiers. That was just routine Democratic "spin" to them.

And then, of course, everybody in the American media already knew that Edwards was nice. As Halperin said in reply to Jennings's question, Edwards had seemed "almost constitutionally unable to be in attack mode when he was running to try to beat John Kerry for the nomination." Now you'd think that a man "almost constitutionally unable to be in attack mode" could hardly have made a fortune, as Edwards did, out of suing doctors and insurance companies. But of course an essential part of a good trial lawyer's skill is the ability to persuade a jury, preferably of the cognitively challenged, that *he* is the "nice" guy while the people he is in the process of ripping the throats out of are the nasty ones. Clearly, Messrs. Shales and Halperin are just the kind of people Edwards would want to see in a jury box, though media Groupthink would probably make any other political reporter in 2004 equally useful from the point of view of the plaintiff's bar.

This is because the power of The Story as it has been adopted by the media in this election year—bright, courageous, idealistic and high-minded Democrats challenge stupid, corrupt, arrogant, and uncaring Republicans—virtually requires that Edwards be nice. For him to be anything else would require a total re-write of the media's script. For if the political conventions are scripted, the media's commentary and interpretation of them are hardly less so. The success over the summer of Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11*, a bit of transparent political propaganda masquerading as a "documentary," was largely owing to the extent to which it played to the same media stereotypes. If everybody—or everybody likely to be in your audience—already knows that President Bush is stupid, corrupt, arrogant, and uncaring, it is the easiest thing in the world for a skilled editor, turned loose on the acres of videotape of any sitting President, to make him look all that and worse.

Yet even in acknowledging as much, the spokesmen for the media consensus were quite happy to have their prejudices confirmed anyway. "All right, you can make anyone into a goofball with a selection of unflattering shots and out-of-context quo-

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tations," wrote David Edelstein of *Slate* in an article sub-titled: "Michael Moore's *Fahrenheit 9/11* is unfair and outrageous. You got a problem with that?" But it's OK if he really *is* a goofball. "It is so very easy," Edelstein goes on, "to make George W. Bush—with his near-demonic blend of smugness and vacuity—look bad." Near-demonic? Gosh! Who knew that it was as easy at *that*. But of course the "near-demonic" comes from the same place that the "smugness and vacuity" come from. It's just what everybody—or everybody Mr. Edelstein knows—is saying about President Bush this summer, even if it is not exactly susceptible of independent verification.

Obviously, Michael Moore has found in Edelstein the same kind of patsy that John Edwards found in Tom Shales. No wonder he hardly even bothers to pretend that he is a real documentarist. Why should he when mere innuendo and malicious suggestion are welcomed even by those who know that they are innuendo and malicious suggestion? A real documentary film-maker looks for the truth beneath a welter of conflicting data, but none of Michael Moore's data conflict in the slightest. All goes to confirm what his audience thought it knew before it ever walked in the door of the cinema. And that audience, perhaps not coincidentally, turned out to be liberal and Democratic in the same overwhelming proportions that the media itself is. Could there be a conspiracy at work here?

Or perhaps you didn't know that the media were liberal and Democratic? According to a study by the Pew Research Center for the People and the Press published last May, 34 percent of journalists surveyed who worked for national news outlets were self-identified "liberals"—up from 22 percent in a similar survey nine years ago—or roughly double the percentage in the population as a whole. Meanwhile, only 7 percent called themselves conservatives (up from 4 percent nine years ago), even though about a third of all Americans do. We might therefore expect to find close to five times as many Kerry-Edwards supporters as Bush-Cheney supporters in the media, even assuming that the 54 percent of the survey's respondents who described themselves as "moderate" remained as scrupulously neutral in the contest as Leonard Downie, executive editor of *The Washington Post*, who doesn't even vote for fear of the accusation of bias.

But of course they don't. When John Tierney of *The New York Times* did an informal survey of 153 of his media colleagues gathered in Boston for the Democratic convention, he found that the regional journalists broke 3-to-1 for Kerry while among the Washington-based ones there were twelve Kerryites for every Bush voter. If there is any good news for Republicans in these numbers, it is that a survey in 1993 showed a similar ratio of Clinton to Bush Senior voters among the fourth estate. So at least things may not be getting worse. Yet Tierney, though he has occasionally shown signs of conservative tendencies himself, was quick to discount the significance of his findings. In an interview with Bill O'Reilly on the Fox News Channel—identified as "conservative" by 69 percent of the respondents to the Pew Survey, even though only 20 percent were prepared to call *The New York Times* "liberal"—he said: "I think most reporters are driven not by ideology, but they're really driven by, you know, the same as people in most professions, by what helps them professionally."

This may be a good moment to discuss this favorite verb in the journalistic lexicon of the last ten or fifteen years. The metaphor of people or even inanimate things who are "driven" by this or that is a particularly useful one for the reason that Tierney shows here. Not "driven" by ideology, he says, journalists must therefore be "really driven" by something else, even though we know that in our own lives motivations are more often multiple than they are single—and especially so when they are motivations to do different things. Journalists may well be "driven" by professional ambition in a great many of the things they do, perhaps most of

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them. But that tells us nothing about whether or not they are "driven" by ideology in some of them, including their choice of words, their attribution of motivations to others, their assumptions about how issues should be defined, or their willingness to hunt for their career-advancing stories in one area—say the President's National Guard service—rather than another—say his published aim of advancing democracy in a part of the world where democracy has never been known before.

Nor does it tell us anything about the extent to which professional advancement may itself depend on a reporter's demonstration by such subtle means as these that he has the right ideology. Assumptions are funny things: often hard to discern and rarely deigning to show themselves in the driver's seat. Yet if you know where to look for them they show up all the time in flashes, as when someone uses an expression like "near-demonic." These are revealing about the writer, but also about his audience, which he can be confident will make no objection even though it will be as indignant as he, on another occasion, about the President's description of the avowed enemies of the United States as an "axis of evil." For those of us with a sense of irony there is plenty to amuse us in this election year.

For example, David Remnick confidently announced in a "Talk of the Town" item in *The New Yorker* recently that "George W. Bush is the worst president the country has endured since Richard Nixon" and advocated voting for Kerry on the less-than-enthusiastic ground that "even mediocrity would be an improvement." This, mind you, as if it were a simple statement of fact and not even controversial—as, indeed, it probably isn't among *The New Yorker* crowd. They don't call it the "Talk of the Town" for nothing! Always on these occasions, one remembers Pauline Kael, the legendary *New Yorker* film critic, on Nixon himself after the landslide of 1972 when she wrote, in seemingly genuine bewilderment, that she didn't know *anyone* who had voted for Nixon. Even Pauline Kael saw through Michael Moore, whose *Roger & Me* she slammed back in 1989. But the editor of *The New Yorker* nowadays is quite happy to engage in the Michael Moore style of insinuation, which is to mouth merely fashionable opinion without a scintilla of real argument.

Not that Remnick doesn't cite what he takes to be the reasons for such a judgment. But these bear a little examination. "The Bush Administration's sins of governance," as he puts it—once again the language of "sin" and "evil" is OK on the left but not the right—include but are not necessarily limited to "its distortion of intelligence in a time of crisis, its grotesque indulgence of the rich at the expense of the rest, its arrogant dissolution of American prestige and influence abroad, its heedless squandering of the world's resources." Yet in every case these "sins" amount to what one suspects is the one cardinal sin of disagreeing with D. Remnick on the most important *political* questions of our time.

Bush used the intelligence that he had—and that every other Western intelligence service had—about the Weapons of Mass Destruction in Iraq, and the fact that he did so is itself no indication of any "distortion," only that the political realities of war-making in a democratic age made it necessary for him to stress the WMD above several other and much better reasons he could also have stressed. These are ignored by Mr. Remnick.

And then there is the supposed "grotesque indulgence of the rich." This may have been, in his view, "at the expense of the rest," but we know that it was not in Mr. Bush's view, nor in that of a great many of his supporters and even some of his opponents who voted for his tax cuts—and how, by the way, are you "indulging" someone by allowing him to keep more of his own money than he was able to do previously?—on the grounds precisely that they would be for the *benefit* of "the rest," since they would stimulate the economy and lead to job growth. It's a somewhat

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complicated economic argument, I suppose, and therefore no shame to Mr. Remnick if he doesn't understand it. But to pretend that there *is* no argument in order the more easily to affix his scarlet letter to the President's chest would be an act of obvious rhetorical negligence if it weren't for the fact that his audience is ready, and he knows it is ready, to hear Mr. Bush roundly traduced without being over-scrupulous as to the grounds.

Likewise, if we assume that by the "arrogant dissolution of American prestige and influence abroad" he means Bush's going to war in Iraq over the objections of the French, the Germans, and the Russians, he must also be assuming that the good opinion of the people who answer opinion poll questions in those countries and elsewhere ought to be a prime objective of American foreign policy. But a contrary view, and one which a great many more people than Mr. Bush take, is that the notion of "prestige and influence" must at the very least also include the elements of fear and respect among potential enemies, which there is good evidence for supposing has considerably increased under this presidency and precisely as a result of its having overridden the concerns of European diplomats who, to put it no more strongly, had their own agendas in opposing us. Once again, Remnick is at liberty to disagree and to say that in his political judgment the popularity of America in Europe is of more importance than the fear of America in the places where terrorism originates, but where does he get off calling a different political judgment a "sin"?

Finally, it is hard to know exactly what Remnick has in mind by referring to the administration's "heedless squandering of the world's resources." Surely the squanderers, if squanderers they be, are the American people who are guzzling all that oil, or perhaps American corporations who are befouling the world's air and water and chopping down its rain forests. The Bush administration is being faulted, then, not for squandering resources but for not stopping the rest of us from squandering them —even if the word "squandering" didn't beg the question as to whether or not any benefits were obtained in exchange for the expenditure of these "resources" and if they offset it in any degree. Yet if the administration has been negligent in this respect, it has not been so "heedlessly." On the contrary, it has made a political judgment that, say, the restrictions on American economic activity included as a corollary of the Kyoto protocol would be unacceptable to the American people—a judgment that Democrats made too in unanimously rejecting the treaty when it came up for a vote in the Senate.

Once again, Remnick is only saying that he disagrees with this political judgment, as he probably disagrees with a great many more of the judgments of this President that he hasn't got time, in "The Talk of the Town," to detail for us. But the mention of "sin," and the view of a strictly political difference as tantamount to criminal behavior in the Nixon comparison, is his own contribution and an indication of the precipitous decline in the quality and intelligence of the political dialogue in our democracy. Very likely the great Republican Monica-hunt of the late 1990s is also partly responsible for this lamentable development, but it's hard to see how things will ever get any better for so long as the media—even media like *The New Yorker* that you might expect to know better—don't even notice it. All the vital signs of genuine political debate are sinking fast while the doctors only know how to theorize about whether the patient will fall out of bed to the right or to the left. But then genuine debate tends to rule out of court the kind of smug self-righteousness that has become the media's stock in trade.

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Books

WFB: Against the prevailing winds

by William McGurn

Perhaps the only realistic element in the persona of Blackford Oakes, the protagonist of William F. Buckley, Jr.'s spy novels, is that he's a Yalie. So far as I am aware, even James Bond did not manage to bed the Queen. As for the rest—startlingly handsome, a gentleman's sense of gallantry, an eminently likeable personality, a temperament forged by a sound, Judeo-Christian outlook and old-fashioned patriotism—well, the odds of finding them in one man, much less a man whom the CIA might in fact hire, must incline to the galactically improbable.

Except when set against the life of Blackie's progenitor. Now closing in on his eightieth birthday, Bill Buckley was born to an oilman expelled from Mexico for his counterrevolutionary sympathies, was packed off to a British boarding school on the eve of World War II, flew planes on the side at Yale, was derided as a "fascist" for writing a book about those years shortly after he graduated, founded what would become one of the twentieth century's most influential journals of opinion before he turned thirty, ran for Mayor of New York, saw a friend who embodied all the ideals of *National Review* elected President and win the Cold War, all the while attracting additional notoriety for equally public roles as sailor, musician, and TV talk-show host. If Ian Fleming had ever proposed such a fabulous character he would have been laughed out of every publishing house in America.

In *Miles Gone By*, Bill now offers up the Authorized Version of this life.[1] Strictly speaking, it is not an autobiography at all, but a collection of previously published material "in the nature of a narrative survey" of his life. The official line is that any autobiography would in effect be a matter of paraphrasing material that has come before.

Though I would have enjoyed a more orthodox memoir—one that not only recounted the course of his life but also weighed earlier judgments and actions on a scale of mature reflection—*Miles Gone By* affords its own advantages. Chief among these is that the material appears more or less as it appeared when he wrote it, to wit, what he thought when he thought it, and not—as with most memoirs—filtering it through what he might prefer to say today.

My personal experience with Bill was limited but telling. In the three years I was on his payroll manning NR's Washington bureau, I don't recall Bill's having once materialized in our offices there. This rather belies what I usually find to be the public image of a political junkie. But Bill's political temperament inclined more to Cincinnatus than Caesar—especially if one imagines Cincinnatus with a sailboat instead of a plow.

There remain those, some of them Bill's comrades in arms, who find this hard to reconcile: the sailor who escapes it all with

1 *Miles Gone By: A Literary Autobiography*, by William F. Buckley, Jr.; Regnery, 594 pages, $29.95.

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the man who helped give America Ronald Reagan (when I was there, the magazine had matchbooks printed with a picture of President Reagan reading NR under the caption: "I got my job through *National Review*"). The concern seems to be that enjoying oneself so thoroughly, at a time when So Many Serious Issues Still Threaten The Republic, violates some precept. But that is only true when measured against the nasty calculus of a utilitarian age that forgets what it means to be human. *Miles Gone By* is a bracing reminder of an essential conservative principle: that the state exists so that we might have private lives, not vice versa.

Consequently, we are presented with a work that only indirectly wades into Buckley's politics or philosophy. The most overt manifestations come in his chapter on his 1951 book *God and Man at Yale*, where he recounts "the heated reaction to a book that professes concurrently a concern over the ascendancy of religious skepticism and political statism." But the impassioned back and forth laid out in that chapter (which illuminates his subsequent decision to found *National Review*) is the exception rather than the rule. This is a work whose dominant tone is an affection that warms each page: affection for his mother and father, for his friends and colleagues, for his faith and his country, for all that made this life possible.

Let me give an example. In the second chapter Bill speaks of being sent by his father to St. John's, Beaumont outside London in 1938. It begins with one of those curious happenstances of biography: As Master Buckley was being transported to his new school, his father commanded the driver to pop by the airport—where the Buckley family watched Neville Chamberlain descend from the airplane that had brought him from Munich to announce he'd brought "peace in our time."

Now, in the best of times one approaches reminiscences about life at a British boarding school—much less one run by Catholic priests—with some trepidation. Leaving aside the standard snickerings over buggery, such memoirs typically include too the standard set pieces about bullying followed by the final settling of scores. It is just here where *Miles Gone By* is different.

It's not that St. John's is some sepia-toned, prewar idyll. To the contrary, Bill makes palpable the "awful homesickness" of a young Buckley "pressing the collar of [his] pajamas" against his mouth lest the others hear him crying out of loneliness. But what bursts through are the occasions of kindliness, and in those places where the emphasis is on wrongs done, they deal with those that a callow young American inflicted on his masters.

In one episode, he accidentally tips over Father Manning's tin of pipe tobacco. A second later the "majestic" Father Manning was on his hands and knees of the study trying to rescue each little grain of tobacco. "That is my month's allowance, Billy," Father Manning tells him. "I cannot afford to let any go unsmoked." Buckley recalls finding this extraordinary—"that this . . . seer should have less than all the tobacco he wanted." Further enquiries about what he might do to alleviate the hardship reveal that Father Manning's vows extended to precluding him from accepting gifts of tobacco. Today, no doubt, the Jesuit fathers have overcome such hard and fast scruples (along with much else), but the impression they left on a young Buckley says something about their effect.

In another instance, he recounts a privileged day out at the Grand National with the visiting Buckley père, at which he was to bet two shillings given him by Father Sharkey on a horse called Workman. As it turned out, Workman proved triumphant, paying 18–1. But Bill had forgotten to place Father Sharkey's bet! He didn't dare tell the senior Buckley, and after "confessing" (no pun intended) to a Father Sharkey who had been happily anticipating his winnings, he went to bed "fearing the obloquy of my schoolmates" once word of his failure leaked out. But the scandal was stillborn, because Father Sharkey had covered for him.

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Understandably *Miles Gone By* features more of the celebrity elbows he's rubbed up against, from David Niven ("In Niven's company, no one had a chance to live very long as a wallflower") and Clare Booth Luce (who "entertained with brilliant charm, wrote for sundry publications, painted, and stared life in the face, including bad personal habits") to *The New Yorker*'s William Shawn (who told him, "Mr. Buckley, I really do not think that you know the correct use of the comma") and colleagues such as Whittaker Chambers, who in *National Review* was inclined to indulge his "orotund gloom" about the coming collapse of Western civilization, but here is presented as being asked by an earnest nineteen-year-old co-ed what he thought of "Itsy Bitsy Teenie Weenie Yellow Polka Dot Bikini."

It is a tribute to Bill that not all the events recorded here show him to advantage. Far from using the memoirs to take full credit for Ronald Reagan, whom he first met in 1961, Bill cheerfully concedes that he was "way behind in apprehending his potential." Even after the Gipper had secured the governorship of California, Bill opined to Nelson Rockefeller "there's no way a former actor could go for President." Rockefeller demurred: anyone who won a California election with a million-vote margin, he declared, was *definitely* presidential material. A pity Rocky is no longer around to read this, for I suspect it is the only recorded public admission from a Reagan Republican ceding superior wisdom to Rockefeller Republicans.

Late-life biographies, of course, are inevitably tinged by melancholy, if only because the more we enjoy the past the more we want to avoid thinking of it as an endnote. But again affection intervenes, especially when he writes of the lesser knowns such as John T. Gaty. Not many histories would mention John Gaty, a man Bill never even met. But in 1967, Bill learned he had been listed in Mr. Gaty's will as one of nine trustees designated to meet once a year—in Wichita—to dispose of his estate to outfits "which will promote individual liberty and incentive as opposed to socialism and communism."

Apart from Bill, the list of desginated trustees included Barry Goldwater, John Tower (who confided to him at one of these meetings that Reagan didn't have the "intellectual ability" to serve as president), Strom Thurmond, Edgar Eisenhower ("the rightwardmost of the three Eisenhower brothers"), and Dean Clarence Manion of the Notre Dame Law School. Over the years a number of fledgling conservative societies survived because of the small grants they received from the Gaty fund, whose benefactor surely would have considered himself repaid beyond his dreams in the election of 1980.

That is not to say that all goes smoothly. Take the time Bill resolved to act on his annual New Year's resolution to do something about "the Milquetoast" in him. The occasion soon presented itself on a Vermont mountaintop while waiting in line at a ski shop. While one attendant waited upon the woman in front of Bill, his middle-aged coworker sat on a nearby stool chatting with his workmate and making no motion to serve the other customers.

After a while, Bill broke. "If you are not too busy," he asked icily, "would you mind handing me a screwdriver?" The man, who had been puffing away on a pipe, looked surprised and apologized—he wasn't supposed to move because he'd just suffered a heart attack. That was the signal, Bill writes, for "a great whirring noise that descended from heaven" as a helicopter landed, a stretcher was produced, and the man was taken to a nearby hospital. From his description of the aftermath in the ski shop, one is left with the sense that at that point the charitable thing might have been to evacuate Bill on that helicopter too.

There is more, much more—too much for one review. I am unqualified to evaluate Bill's musical forays. The chapter on his solo performance of Bach's Concerto in F-minor before the Phoenix Symphony Chamber Orchestra goes into considerable detail

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about the many months of practice the invitation required. In many ways, however, the enterprise strikes me as not so far removed from his work at *National Review*, where he presided over an intimidating array of conservative noises: the mournful low notes of the cello (Whittaker Chambers); the clear trumpet (Frank Meyer); the iconoclastic bassoon (Willi Schlamm); the happy, self-deprecating flute (his sister Aloise Buckley Heath); and the steady A of the oboe to which the others are tuned (Jim Burnham). Against the demand to extract some sort of editorial harmony from this crowd, an eight-and-a-half minute Bach concerto must have come as something of a relief.

About the sailing I am even less qualified to judge. Given my own tendencies toward the Sam McGee School of the hardships and forced intimacy of such excursions ("It wasn't much fun but the only one to whimper was Sam McGee"), such passages do not elicit from me any wish-I-was-there feelings. This has nothing to do with Bill's writing. To the contrary, there is a good argument to be made that it is precisely when Bill is writing about sailing that he is at his most taut and rhythmic, as in the passage that ends this book:

> You have shortened the sail just a little, because you want more steadiness than you get at this speed, the wind up to twenty-two, twenty-four knots, and it is late at night, and there are only two of you in the cockpit. You are moving at racing speed, parting the buttery sea as with a scalpel, and the waters roar by, themselves exuberantly subdued by your powers to command your way through them. Triumphalism . . . and the stars seem to be singing for joy.

You could say the same thing about the satisfaction that comes from writing a fine paragraph. Or a life that set itself, with astounding success, against most of the prevailing winds of his day.

Come to think of it, I think he just did.

A disgraceful career

Peter Collier & David Horowitz, editors
The Anti-Chomsky Reader.
Encounter Books, 260 pages,
$17.95 (paper)

reviewed by Keith Windschuttle

One of the main reasons Noam Chomsky's political views are taken seriously in universities and the media is because he has an awesome reputation for scientific accomplishment in the field of linguistics. He is among the ten most cited authors in the humanities—trailing only Marx, Lenin, Shakespeare, the Bible, Aristotle, Plato, and Freud—and the only living member of the top ten. Last year *The New Yorker* called him "one of the greatest minds of the twentieth century."

Were it not for this status, many of his obsessive and outlandish political ideas would by now have disqualified him from reasoned debate. He thinks every president of the United States since Franklin Roosevelt should have been impeached because "they've all been either outright war criminals or involved in serious war crimes." He claims the United States actively collaborated with the Nazis against the Soviet Union in the latter stages of World War II. He once supported the Pol Pot regime in Cambodia, claiming the genocidal evacuation of Phnom Penh in 1976 was due to a failed rice crop and "may actually have saved many lives." He describes Israel as a terror state with "points of similarity" to the Third Reich. And he has defended an anti-Semitic French academic who claims the Holocaust was a "historical lie." Chomsky describes him as nothing more than an "apolitical liberal" whose work is based on "extensive historical research."

The most devastating articles in the *Anti-Chomsky Reader* are not those that expose the ideological prejudices, factual misrepresentations, and distorted logic of his political writings but the two at the end of the book that tear up his reputation as one

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of the towering intellects of our time. Two essays about linguistics reveal Chomsky's output in that field to be not the work of a rare, great mind but the product of a very familiar kind of academic hack. His reputation turns out not to have been earned by any significant contribution to human understanding but to be the product of a combination of self-promotion, abuse of detractors, and the fudging of his findings.

John Williamson points out that fifty years after the announcement of the "Chomskyan revolution" in linguistics, immense progress has been made in almost every field of science. "We have been to the moon several times," he writes. "Our way of life depends upon the computer chip." The work of Einstein, to whom some of Chomsky's fans compare him, has been confirmed many times and can explain many physical phenomena. But in linguistics, Williamson shows, the results are comparatively trivial. All that Chomskyan grammar can explain is language which is transparent and easily labelled: "first-order" sentences such as *The keeper fed the bananas to the monkey*. Grammatical formulations of the "second order of difficulty," such as *For there to be a snowstorm would be nice*, still remain a mystery.

Moreover, Chomsky has not established a grand new paradigm for his field, and then spent the rest of his life building upon its foundations and encouraging other researchers to do the same, as would have happened had his project been genuinely important. Instead, his work has resembled a pattern all too familiar in the humanities and social sciences of one overblown speculation following another. Williamson writes:

> The history of Chomskyan theory is a study in cycles. He announces a new and exciting idea, which adherents to the faith then use and begin to make all kinds of headway. But this progress is invariably followed by complications, then by contradictions, then by a flurry of patchwork fixes, then by a slow unravelling, and finally by stagnation. Eventually the master announces a new approach and the cycle starts anew.

Over Chomsky's career, these cycles have gone from "transformational grammar and deep structure," to "universal grammar," then to "principles and parameters." The most recent approach, launched in 1995, is called "minimalism." And what has all this accomplished? Chomskyan theory has not even developed a rational means of explaining why the sentence *John was decided to leave early* is ungrammatical. If this had been real science, the project would have lost its funding years ago for lack of results.

Robert E. Levine and Paul M. Postal, in an essay appropriately entitled "A Corrupted Linguistics," are equally critical of Chomsky's puffed-up promises. They write:

> Much of the lavish praise heaped on his work is, we believe, driven by uncritical acceptance (often by nonlinguists) of claims and promises made during the early years of his academic activity; the claims have by now largely proved to be wrong or without real content, and the promises have gone unfulfilled.

Commentators who are not linguists often discern a fundamental contrast between Chomsky's academic work on linguistics and his non-academic writings about politics. They take the former to be brilliant, revolutionary, and widely accepted, but recognize the latter as radical and controversial.

Levine and Postal, however, both academic linguists, don't see it this way. Rather than a great divide between his scholarly and popular writings, they find both share the same key properties: "a deep disregard and contempt for the truth, a monumental disdain for standards of enquiry, a relentless strain of self-promotion, remarkable descents into incoherence, and a penchant for verbally abusing those who disagree with him." They provide four revealing examples:

- In his earliest and most celebrated book, *Syntactic Structures* (1957) Chomsky cov-

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ered up an inconsistency in his theory by publishing a statement about the grammatical rule for passive voice, even though he knew from other work of his own that the statement was untrue.

- After a dissertation by one of his own doctoral students, John Ross, had shown that one of Chomsky's purported "universal principles" of grammar was not actually universal, Chomsky refused to give up the principle and simply avoided mentioning Ross's critique. "The worst aspect of this subterfuge," Levine and Postal write, "is his touting of a failed principle as a genuine discovery to non-linguist audiences unprepared to recognize the dishonesty involved." He cited it in an interview with one credulous reporter and repeated the claim in a much more prominent interview in *The New Yorker* last year.

- Levine and Postal record that Chomsky has sometimes rejected proposals made by other linguists, often in the strongest terms, but then later adopted those very proposals himself, without attribution or credit. This occurred with the concept of "deep structure," which is one of the ideas by which Chomsky is best known to lay audiences. In the 1970s, other linguists showed that "deep structure" was untenable. Chomsky at first defended his idea and ferociously opposed his detractors. He eventually gave away the concept himself in the early 1990s. But in abandoning it, he made no open announcement that he had done so, nor acknowledged the critique whose alternative thesis he adopted.

- In an effort to disguise his own failures, Chomsky has denigrated the results of scientific research in general. In his 2002 book *Nature and Language*, he was questioned by two interviewers who, despite being long-time enthusiasts, asked the big and by then embarrassing question about what he considered the "established results" of his work. Instead of producing some actual results, Chomsky chose to scorn the very idea of scientific results. "My own view is that everything is subject to question," he answered. "Even in the advanced sciences, everything is questionable." Levine and Postal point out that anyone with the slightest acquaintance with modern physical sciences would recognize this as a grotesque misrepresentation of science's true nature and its findings. Chomsky was deliberately distorting the status of the numerous genuine discoveries science has made in order to cover up his own inability to produce any.

Chomsky's stance here is particularly hypocritical, given a further point Williamson makes about his recent work. He has lately been attributing physical properties to the elements of language, applying terms used by hard sciences such as physics and chemistry. Chomsky and his followers now employ descriptions such as "light" and "heavy" phrases or "weak" and "strong" attraction between words in an attempt to explain the behavior of verbs and adjectives in the same terms as subatomic particles. Williamson also notes that Chomsky has presented transformational grammar as similar to the chemical sequencing of biochemistry, and appropriated the phrase "principles and parameters" from computer science.

Williamson's essay is a very amusing read. He recounts exchanges of emails he has had with Chomsky over a range of issues from the American role in World War II to technical aspects of linguistic theory. One exchange was about the role of transitive and intransitive verbs. Chomsky's thesis is that the rarity of one type of usage of intransitive verbs is such that it provides evidence the human brain has a preference for certain grammatical structures. This, in turn, is evidence for Chomsky's well-known claim (popularized by his loyal follower Steven Pinker) that grammar is innate and that humans are biologically "hard-wired" for

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grammar. In one of his emails, Williamson challenged this thesis with a list of ten examples of transitive and intransitive verbs that clearly failed to obey these hard-wired rules. In a footnote, Williamson reveals how intellectually taxing he found this task: "I would like to thank the girls of Hooters at the Jefferson Davis Turnpike location south of Richmond for helping me to compile this list."

Collier, Horowitz, and their six other authors have produced a book that has long been needed. It provides a penetrating coverage of the disgraceful career of a disgraceful but very influential man, who has so far avoided a criticism as thoroughgoing as this. Steven Morris, Thomas Nichols, and Eli Lehrer provide powerful critical analyses of Chomsky's writings about Vietnam, Cambodia, the Cold War, and the news media. Two essays by Paul Bogdanor and Werner Cohn examine Chomsky's compulsive hatred for the state of Israel and his support for neo-Nazi Holocaust deniers.

These days, Chomsky's denunciations of Israel dispense with the once-familiar distinction between Zionists and Jews. He has become a proponent of outright anti-Semitism. The prospect of Chomsky's legion of adolescent and academic followers adopting the same stance makes Bogdanor's and Cohn's articles particularly depressing. David Horowitz and Ronald Radosh analyze his long career of denouncing the United States, the country that has sustained him for his seventy-four years and given him all that he has.

Anyone who likes seeing such a celebrated leftist being skewered by his own words and arguments will enjoy much of this book hugely, but its overall effect is actually very sobering. What is it about Western intellectual culture, and American academic culture in particular, that has led so many potentially talented people to turn into such blind and hate-filled critics? There is no answer in this book, but it sure makes you wonder.

Faking it

Ronald D. Spencer, editor
The Expert versus the Object: Judging Fakes & False Attributions in the Visual Arts.
Oxford University Press, 240 pages, $35

reviewed by Marco Grassi

What a difference a century can make! In 1897, Bernard Berenson concluded the preface to his *Italian Painters of the Renaissance* with the words: "No artifact is a work of art if it does not help to humanize us. Without art, visual, verbal, musical, our world would have remained a jungle." It is the voice of the Edwardian dilettante and gentleman-aesthete, very much at the center of *his* art-world. *The Expert versus the Object* is the title Ronald D. Spencer gives to a new collection of essays and interviews that focus on (according to the subtitle) "fakes and false attributions in the visual arts," and the eventual legal ramifications thereof. Mr. Spencer, a respected attorney, and the various other contributors to the volume—art-historians, conservators, dealers, and auction-house experts—speak from what we might consider the very center of *our* art-world.

At first glance, one might think that, in the intervening century, the jungle has overtaken us . . . and although the Berensonian ethos of culture, privilege, and leisure has certainly and inevitably evolved into the pragmatic, professional, success-oriented environment that we know today, the art object was even then, and continues to be, the focus of high-stakes marketplace maneuverings and even higher-stakes confrontations in the courtroom. Not surprisingly, that "versus" in Mr. Spencer's title says it all. His book leaves no doubt that the art object is an artifact that must be challenged and that challenges us in return: clearly outlined is an adversarial debate being vigorously pursued in museums, galleries, academies, laboratories, and, of course, courtrooms the world over. Indeed,

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the introduction leaves no doubt that the volume's purpose is to serve as a guide for the un-tutored and un-professional daring enough to venture into the deadly cross-fire.

Roughly the first half of the book comprises essays and interviews in which noted art-world professionals deal with various issues of authentication. The remainder of the volume is mostly by Mr. Spencer himself. It traces, through specific case histories, how some of these issues of authentication have been dealt with in the court of law, here and overseas.

Oddly, it is this second part of the book that makes for the more lively and interesting reading. Not only do some familiar names pop up (Wildenstein, Dubuffet, Agnew's, Sotheby's, Pollock, and so forth), but the furious challenges and counter-challenges that are skillfully recounted describe a reality that is light-years removed from Berenson's genteel musings of a century ago about the life-enhancing nature of high art . . . yet certainly more charged with quintessentially human motivations: greed, pride, revenge—in a word: with drama.

How can one not be riveted, even after so many decades, in learning about the judicial joust engendered by the deprecating remarks of the irrepressible Sir Joseph Duveen (not yet Lord Duveen of Milbank) on the subject of Mrs. Andreé Hahn's "Leonardo"? Although the famous art dealer was persuaded to settle for the then gigantic sum of $60,000, he was, of course, right: the Hahn picture has never been regarded as anything but a period copy. There is no better example of the oft-repeated maxim that the art object will, inevitably, command the last word.

Despite the amusing, almost anecdotal, quality of these courtroom confrontations, and keeping in mind the book's stated didactic purpose, one wonders what *practical* advice the reader will derive from learning about judicial decisions rendered in different circumstances and even different jurisdictions. A far more useful and comprehensive account of the law as it applies to matters of art will be found in Lerner and Bresler's *Art Law* (both the single-volume 1989 edition and the much-expanded two-volume second edition of 1998). Inexplicably, this eminently comprehensive and useful work is not even mentioned in any of the notes, let alone the text, of Mr. Spencer's book.

Turning to the first part of *The Expert versus the Object*, we find contributions of acknowledged and eminent experts who express, undoubtedly, the best of contemporary thought on matters such as attribution, cataloguing, scientific testing, and "the trade." Not surprisingly, the quality of this material and its exposition varies considerably. It should be pointed out that while this unevenness is inherent in any anthological compilation, one common denominator does link, at least thematically, these various articles: its virtually exclusive preoccupation with the pictorial arts—painting and sculpture. Issues of authenticity and verification in the fields of literature, music, the sciences, even architecture, are not addressed.

This said, there are descriptive, thoroughly straightforward accounts replete with detailed information such as the nature and purpose of the catalogue raisonné (Michael Findlay and Peter Kraus), the creation and current role of IFAR (International Foundation for Art Research), the technical examination of artistic objects (Rustin Levinson).

On the whole, these tend to reassure the reader that substantial progress is being made to evaluate objects (both art-historically and venally), and that such evaluation *can* be verifiable and reliable. After all, documentation is constantly increasing in quantity and quality; collaboration among specialists on important cataloguing projects is now the norm, as is the participation of collateral experts in the fields of conservation and the physical sciences; the verification process is progressively being rendered more independent from economic

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enticements and constraints. Objectivity at last!

Well, not so fast. Shakier ground is soon under foot. In several other articles we learn that, despite all else, authentication still rests essentially with the individual—with the experience, knowledge, taste, and talent that are the irreplaceable ingredients of any considered judgment; in a word, with connoisseurship. An elusive quality at best, yet we are time and again reminded that connoisseurship is of capital importance in every step of the authentication process: for the identification of copies and forgeries (Francis O'Connor and Eugene Thaw), for the attribution and authentication of paintings and drawings (John Tancock and Noël Annesley), and, finally (why not?), for handwriting analysis (Patricia Siegel).

Indeed, the authors describe events that seem to subvert totally any sense of serenity or certainty about art-world "objectivity" that may have been encouraged elsewhere. We learn, for example, that just over ten years ago a Titianesque painting offered at auction was sold, in a frenzy of bidding, for $11 million to no less a buyer than the Getty Museum. Clearly, a lot of well-informed people, not only in that prestigious institution but also advising the competing bidders, were convinced that on the block was a painting fully by the hand of that greatest of Venetian artists. Today, the same painting is more modestly labeled "Titian and assistants" . . . back to where it was before its sale!

Even more disquieting is the example of the drawing *David Taking Leave of Jonathan* with an unblemished attribution history to Rembrandt. We are told that, more recently, "some weaknesses of execution have become apparent, and matters are unresolved at the present." Now Rembrandt scholarship is hardly a new or neglected discipline; how could these "weaknesses" have escaped the intense gaze of generations of connoisseurs—experts of the stature of Otto Benesch and Cornelis Hofstede de Groot? And if matters are to remain "unresolved" what comfort does this give to the present owner of the drawing?

The intellectual paths that the various authors follow are obviously conflicting: on the one hand is the conviction that solutions to art-historical problems will inevitably be found, as long as sufficient research, documentation, and physical evidence are applied to the task. Almost as the reverse of the same coin is the equally keen awareness that no matter how brightly the investigative light shines, all we can hope for is conjecture—basically, an educated guess. This painful inconsistency is best illustrated by Peter Sutton's informative and well-presented account of the controversial "Rembrandt Research Project," an ambitious undertaking that has, over the many years since its inception, come to grips with a harsh reality: the impossibility of resolving even some very fundamental issues of chronology and attribution.

And in this rather unsatisfactory balance is where the matter must rest. Even the high hopes engendered by the application of science and computer-generated data have often been deluded. Levinson, for instance, notes that the English researcher Spike Bucklow "has been able to associate *craquelure* patterns with different eras of art history." The problem is that, based on these studies, Bucklow has just recently released a full-dress paper conclusively confirming as genuine a supposedly fourteenth-century Sienese painted wedding casket. Unfortunately for Mr. Bucklow and the reputation of conservation science, the casket has, for years, been known to be a modern concoction, a howling forgery.

Each and every one of the contributors to *The Expert versus the Object* is, in his or her area of expertise, someone who has grappled with the "unsatisfactory balance" mentioned above, throughout a long and successful professional life. Such success and recognition in the field of the pictorial arts (artists-creators themselves, of course, excluded) can only come to someone who has, for years,

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combined remarkable visual perception and awareness with scholarly diligence and intellectual curiosity. After weighing that which can be *known* through research and empirical verification and that which can be *intuited* through the sensitive inner eye, the connoisseur will render a judgment that is neither wholly "objective" nor wholly "subjective" . . . and even though it may be "right," it may not be so for very long. It goes without saying that those active in the field and certainly the contributing authors here are all perfectly aware of this. Putting it in writing for a reader outside the field presents a problem, however, a problem from which the present volume, as we have seen, is not entirely free—particularly since the authors squarely address the layman in the hope that the book will serve as a guide.

As if this were not enough to confuse the more casual observer, some contemporary practitioners of art-history have, of late, been promoting the view that what *really* matters is not the object itself but the social/economic/gender/political context it represents. In this school of thought, such profound suspicion of the object has inevitably led to its removal from centerstage, a position never questioned by art historians of preceding generations. Now, the object's physical identity—its quality, style, period, conservation—are all suddenly rendered, if not irrelevant, surely marginal. By extension, those institutions that collect and conserve objects—museums—are no longer seen as the principal and indispensable repositories of our artistic heritage. According to this reading of the art object, one can (and many do) legitimately ask: authenticity, attribution, age; do they, *au fond*, make any difference?

Consider an elaborately installed, meticulously catalogued exhibition that, at this writing, is garnering considerable critical and popular success: *Falsi d'Autore—Icilio Federico Joni e la cultura del falso tra Otto e Novecento* (Santa Maria della Scala, Siena). It is a survey of works by one of the most spectacularly inventive and proficient forgers ever to practice that shadowy craft. Works by other similar "specialists" are also included, compared, and evaluated. The not-too-subtle subtext throughout the exhibit is that, since these various painters and sculptors did not *copy* known antique prototypes, but *invented* their artifacts by skillfully blending diverse stylistic strands from the past, their work assumes, in its own right, undeniable artistic legitimacy.

Apart from the fact that there is a perfectly applicable term to the activity of the forger—*fraud*—Peter Sutton admirably and succinctly stated the case for why we should care, and care passionately, about a painting being or not being by Rembrandt: "because seventeenth century patrons and collectors did."

The more straightforward issues posed by forgeries—objects created with an intent to deceive—are undoubtedly intriguing, but, in fact, the vast majority of authentication questions involve genuine works of art whose status has been rendered uncertain by one element: time. The more time passes between the creation of an object and the moment it is placed before us, the more variables conspire to cloud its true identity. By a peculiar paradox this effect functions precisely in an inverse proportion when examining forgeries: the more time passes, the more they reveal themselves for what they really are.

Thus, the process of authentication, reduced to its core, is simply the progressive resolution of those variables that time has introduced—and their replacement with certainties, or near certainties. It is the process that *The Expert versus the Object* seeks to describe in its manifold manifestations, and eventual legal ramifications. The often conflicting conclusions that will inevitably be drawn from reading this collection of diverse contributions may well heighten rather than diminish the reader's anxiety level vis-à-vis the art object. One hopes, however, this will not deter continued engagement in the process of authentication, a process that—by another name—is the search for truth.

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A literary river

Victor Serge
The Case of Comrade Tulayev,
translated by Willard R. Trask,
introduction by Susan Sontag.
New York Review Books,
368 pages, $14.95

reviewed by Stephen Schwartz

Victor Serge was, and remains, unique: the only novelist to describe successfully, from the inside, the now long-lost milieu of the socialist movement in Europe, its Soviet product, and its destruction by Stalinism. He has been described by myself and others as a political Ishmael, comparable to the lone survivor of the wrecked vessel *Pequod* in Melville's *Moby-Dick*.

Born in 1890 in Belgium, to a family of Russian exiles, he died in 1947 in a Mexico City taxicab. He was very likely murdered by Soviet agents. He had been associated both with Trotsky and, after the latter's assassination in 1940, with Trotsky's widow Natalya Sedova—with whom Serge co-authored a biography of her husband. The US government's release, in July 1995, of the decrypted Soviet secret message traffic known as "Venona" revealed that there indeed was a cell of Mexico City cab drivers under Soviet discipline, who specialized in liquidations.

Serge perished at fifty-seven, too young, and a year short of an event about which his commentary might have been quite significant: the Stalin-Tito break. As it happened, Serge knew quite a bit about the Serbian radical circles that brought about the Sarajevo assassination of 1914, and therefore the First World War.

As with the other Communist opposition intellectuals done to death by Moscow, the chief loss to humanity in their destruction may have been that they were prevented from sharing, with the generations that followed, their reactions to events they never anticipated—the birth of the state of Israel, the maturation of American consumer society, the Korean War, the proletarian rebellions against Communism in Berlin in 1953 and Poland and Hungary in 1956, and, of course, Nikita Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin in the latter year. Trotsky, whose visceral horror of Nazism led him, at the end of his life, to accept a need for a Jewish national home, would have been no older than sixty-eight when Israel declared its independence. His widow was driven by North Korean aggression against its southern neighbor to break with the Trotskyist movement altogether.

Serge's novels have never been widely read in English, and it's a pity. His fiction emulated the now-also-defunct French genre of the *roman-fleuve* or literary river, once exemplified by the work of Jules Romains, in which a group of characters is followed through the passage of decades. In his series, Serge traced the revolutionary events of the twentieth century from the anarchist movement and disasters of the "Great War" (*Men in Prison*), through the revolutionary dawn in Barcelona and Petrograd in 1917 (*Birth of Our Power*), to the inner life of Soviet secret police agents in besieged Petrograd in 1919 (*Conquered City*).

These three volumes were published in France in 1930–1932, after their author, a former functionary of the Communist International, had been barred from political work in the Russia where he had chosen to live. In 1933, he was arrested by the Soviet secret police, and in 1936 a campaign in his favor, which gained the support of André Gide, secured his release from house arrest in Orenburg, a town on the border of Kazakhstan (where his former residence is now a museum dedicated to him). He was sent to live in the West, probably thanks to his birth there and claim on Belgian citizenship.

He then issued a series of fiery pamphlets exposing the fate of the Bolshevik revolution and the truth about the Moscow Trials; he also added three more novels to his stream of fiction: *Midnight in the Century*, describing the life of Stalin's political

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prisoners, published in France in 1939; *The Case of Comrade Tulayev*, which did not appear until after his death, and *The Long Dusk*, set during the fall of France, and which came out in 1946.

The Case of Comrade Tulayev—ironically enough, Serge's best-known novel—has now been reissued in a series published by *The New York Review of Books*, with a perfunctory introduction by Susan Sontag. The panoramic, plotless action in *Tulayev* takes place in 1939, and includes a horrific evocation of Soviet criminality in Spain, as the war there approached its end. But its central event, the assassination of a high Soviet official by an anonymous member of the masses (who is never caught), is much more evocative of the 1934 slaying of Sergei Kirov, the Leningrad party chief, which became the pretext employed by Stalin for the great purges.

The book goes on to describe, like the ripples in a lake, the reaction of the Soviet bureaucracy to an act motivated by individual disgust. Serge himself insisted that the book should not be read as a *roman à clef*, and, Sontag writes, "perhaps one should take Serge at his word. . . . The arrests and trials [in *Tulayev*] are fictional successors to, rather than a fictional synthesis of, the actual Moscow trials of 1936, 1937, and 1938."

One might argue that Sontag is wrong here. Serge's narrative gift derived from direct experience of events, and he knew the atmosphere of 1934 in Russia, while he did not know that of 1939. Further, the environment of *Tulayev* is one in which a Soviet kind of normality, although disintegrating, still exists; it is not the ambience of Russia after the purges, which was, as numerous original sources, historians, and memoirists attest, a bleak landscape of utter fear and passivity. Besides, assassinations of high Soviet officials were extremely rare; Kirov's was the only one most Soviet subjects could remember. In *Tulayev*, the killing is hushed up by the state authorities. Serge, writing in 1939, doubtless had his own reasons for altering reality as he did.

Sontag also includes in her introduction an astonishingly stupid reproach, based on her feminist loyalties. Serge, she writes, "is not charting a new road [in] his view of women. . . . In this entirely men-centered society of challenge—and ordeal, and sacrifice—women barely exist, at least not positively, except through being the love objects, or wards, of very busy men." So the feminist commissar Sontag demands "positive" female characters from Victor Serge, echoing the Muscovite functionaries who called for "positive" proletarian figures from his peers in Soviet literature. Sontag goes on to whine that a female prosecutor in *Tulayev* is portrayed as sexually needy.

If Sontag really knew Serge's books, she would find positive, even assertive females in them, including women stronger than his male protagonists. Is Serge really to be criticized for failing to imagine the personalities of Sontagesque women and for accurately depicting the society of his time, from which Sontag's feminism was missing? Victor Serge deserves to be read and reread today, but he also deserves better, and more honest, literary defenders.

Why the long face?

Barbara Feinberg
Welcome to Lizard Motel:
Children, Stories, and the
Mystery of Making Things Up.
Beacon Press, 209 pages, $23.00

reviewed by Stefan Beck

In the seventh grade, at my small public middle school, I grumbled persistently about the books my English teacher assigned. She sensed in my recalcitrance a chance for experimentation and devised a new curriculum for me: I would read the entire *oeuvre* of a fellow called Robert Cormier—best known for his once-controversial *The Chocolate War*—and interview him by telephone.

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The project was not a pleasant one. Jerry Renault, the protagonist of *The Chocolate War*, is essentially a Holden Caulfield clone; the book is gloomy and pedantic: all life is suffering, *non illegitimi carborundum*, and the like. Cormier's other "young adult novels" hinge on home invasion, a school bus hijacking, a boy living in an experimental medical clinic, and other hypothetical "growing pains." The interview that capped off my grueling reading confirmed my suspicion that this author wishes to teach children that life isn't fair and *get used to it*.

Barbara Feinberg's *Welcome to Lizard Motel*, which looks at the popularity among educators of just this sort of "problem novel," never mentions Cormier—but the books it does mention are, against all odds, even uglier than his. Next to the classics of children's literature (I would hold up the work of C. S. Lewis, E. B. White, or even Roald Dahl), these books are "narrower in focus, less rich in narrative scope, and at times [feel] 'as if the writers had begun with the problem rather than the plot or characters.'"

What might that problem be? Take your pick. While doing research, Feinberg encounters a librarian who offers this apt précis of the "problem novel": "Oh—my mother's boyfriend raped me, and my mother is in jail, and I have a brain tumor? Those books?" Indeed—and the fact that those books are so contrived, so unsubtle, must account for much of the emphasis today's curricula place upon them. Children, says Feinberg, desire "recourse to fantasy"; a teacher may see fantasy as an impediment to instruction.

It has become a part of the teacher's perceived duty to expose children to the nasty side of life—as though life itself were not perfectly capable of doing so. Yet, strangely, the means children use to cope with that nastiness—imagination, humor, and storytelling—are given shorter and shorter shrift. For example, Feinberg's seven-year-old daughter is placed in a writing program at school, in which she is to write, of all things, a memoir. (Just the facts, ma'am.)

> In the quirky conditional voice with which Clair has written about our lives as if all the things in our lives are over, have already passed, used to be, "would" occur, and are present now only in memory, the implication is that these things occur no more. . . .
>
> This whole enterprise is something adults have imposed. And why? Why is my generation hell-bent on making our children wake from the dream of their childhoods? So they can fast-forward to a time when their childhoods are over, safely encoded in memory? So they are like adults, dreamy with nostalgia?

"Dreamy with nostalgia" is not quite the phrase this exercise suggests. Quite to the contrary, the impulse to teach seven year olds the art of memoir seems of a piece with the therapy obsession of Barbara Feinberg's generation. That this obsession is trickling down to the young is everywhere in evidence. Witness the phenomenon of "reality television": participants are startlingly adept at discussing and interpreting their behavior and feelings, but at a total loss when it comes to applying this self-knowledge in a useful way.

It hardly needs stating that this preoccupation is not something that ought to be encouraged in young children. It tends more than anything else to foster a myopic self-absorption. Feinberg notes that (according to the children's literature specialist Sheila Egoff), "problem novels" are "often told in the first person, and [are] often confessional and self-centered." (This mode will be familiar to anyone who has rolled his eyes through a creative writing "workshop.")

Again, the thinking seems to be that the earlier children learn that life will kick them when they're down—and that constant, focused reflection of life's worst elements is the best medicine—the better off they'll be. Whether or not this outlook is even remotely therapeutic for adults, Feinberg makes it clear that it isn't for children—whether in their writing or reading. But what should be encouraged instead?

Feinberg is herself a teacher. She runs a

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children's arts program called Story Shop, and her methods sound far better suited to a child's taste than any memoir-writing program: "Children write stories, and tell them, and enact them, and build scenes and characters out of paper and boxes and odds and ends." In other words, her young charges have complete freedom to pursue the fantastic and absurd, without the stifling intrusion of adult concerns.

They don't have to write about themselves, either. Feinberg insists that "Interest in a child's experience, as a means toward vitalizing writing, is constraining, not expanding, if I insist that the only meaningful story a child can relay is one that is actual."

It should surprise no one that children prefer fantasy to reflection; at seven years old, one doesn't have much to reflect upon. But there is an even clearer reason for it: when teachers insist upon sobriety, realism, and—whether or not they intend it—disillusionment, they miss the point that a vigorous imagination in fact fortifies one against unhappiness.

A case in point: Feinberg learns from a friend who works in an orphanage that suffering children, even ones as old as twelve or thirteen, prefer Mother Goose to "problem novels" like *Bridge to Terebithia* (in which the main character's best friend drowns) or *They Cage the Animals at Night* (about a boy abandoned to foster care by his mother). For these children, the smallest comfort or creative indulgence is preferable to dwelling on their own tragedies.

Of course, at its best, the adult desire to examine the self is indispensable. But in contemporary literature, popular culture, and education, the activity reeks of navel-gazing and self-satisfaction, not the pursuit of virtue or maturity. Children naturally have the right idea: they grow by looking outward with a curious and often selfless eye.

The final surprise of *Lizard Motel* is that Barbara Feinberg does not make her recommendations from a comfortable perch. The book, as noted on its jacket, is largely a memoir itself. The last third deals with Feinberg's young daughter's surgeries for a benign (though recurring) inner ear tumor. It's the stuff of "problem novels," to be sure, but Feinberg dodges the temptation to be dark—or to exploit her family's difficulty. Instead she offers her story as proof that humor and imagination are the thing:

> Just as we come to the door of the operating room, Clair gets out of the car. As we are about to enter, she suddenly falls to her knees, grabbing the anesthesiologist, who is a sober German named Dr. Schmidt, and says, "You gotta help me, Doc! I'm doomed. I've got a wife and three kids at home!" Dr. Schmidt and the rest of us are bewildered, and frozen, for the moment. But then everyone bursts out laughing. . . . [Clair] shrugs and says, "I saw that on a Bugs Bunny cartoon once."

A joke? Right outside the operating room? Our inward-looking society, with all its indignant victims, ought to give this bedside manner a try.

Literature *v.* trivia

Dubravka Ugresic
Thank You for Not Reading:
Essays on Literary Trivia,
translated by Celia Hawkesworth &
Damion Searles.
Dalkey Archive, 225 pages, $13.95

reviewed by Tess Lewis

In 1988, the Yugoslavian writer Dubravka Ugresic published her first novel, *Fording the Stream of Consciousness*, an amusing satire of international literary conferences. Its plot includes, besides a dead poet and a stolen manuscript, a purported descendant of Gustave Flaubert named Jean-Paul Flagus who is conspiring to found the Agency for the Totalitarian Control of Literature. By fostering "bands of third-rate speed writers" who will poach ideas, themes, and titles from major writers, Flagus plans on "considerably accelerating the pace of literary inflation and . . . undermining the myth of a

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great, unmatched, and unmatchable body of literature." The novel's English translation did not appear until 1993, after Ugresic's nation had disintegrated into warring ethnic factions and she had become, against her wishes, a Croatian writer. Her outspokenness and her cutting wit, selected and translated in her 1994 essay collection, *The Culture of Lies*, soon made exile inevitable.

In the West she found herself, just as Flagus had fantasized, in "an era of Salieri rather than Mozart, a time in which literature is based upon production values, and production is something that, in principle at least, lends itself to control." Yet the controlling powers were no longer Communist Party censors or politically ambitious megalomaniacal mediocrities, but the laws of the marketplace. Having no more patience for the follies and hypocrisies of one system over those of another, Ugresic took aim again.

In her political essays, Ugresic's targets were primarily the collective amnesia embraced by or forced upon the populace in the name of nationalism, and the mendacity necessary to sustain the pretence of a functioning Communist utopia. In the literary essays gathered in *Thank You for Not Reading*, she decries the cultural amnesia and intellectual frivolity that have allowed trivia to swamp "contemporary literary life, and become, it seems, more important than the books"—and that have fostered the "democratic idea that everyone can be a writer." Celebrity authors like Ivana Trump and Joan Collins, astronomical advances, agents, scouts, and subagents, for whom literature is a lifestyle rather than a vocation, all earn her very pointed scorn.

But there are broader, even more insidious forces at work than merely the glamorization of the trappings of literary life. In "Come Back, Cynics, All is Forgiven!," Ugresic notes that "Mainstream culture, about which the sophisticated speak with contempt, has gradually vacuumed up every cultural subversion, including the contempt of the sophisticated, and become simply culture. From the culture of camp, via the postmodern, ironic artistic obsession with bad art, bad art has become art itself." No longer valuing wit, subtlety, and accomplishment, we have turned, as a culture, to fetishizing authenticity and sincerity.

This ideology of authenticity and sincerity, in which the highest value is placed upon "*ordinary* accounts of *ordinary* people about *ordinary* things," has become a new fascism, a tyranny of the least common denominator, and its face is optimism. In "Optimism Strengthens the Organism," Ugresic declares herself ready to join the ranks of the new populists. As a reformed pessimist, she knows that being a culture-optimist is more fun and easier. There's little need to be consistent.

> The fact that [the optimist] defends cultural populism does not mean that he himself has to drink Budweiser. Given a choice between Varteks (a former Yugoslav brand of clothing) and Versace, he will of course choose Versace. However, when it's a matter of literature, the culture-optimist will immediately take the side of Danielle Steel and agree with the people who are indifferent to Dante, because Dante "doesn't relate to them." Whereas Danielle "does."

Value judgments are for the pessimists. And they are an unpleasant bunch: "complaining, apocalyptic, tedious, nostalgic, elitist, conservative, dogmatic, boring, defenders of traditional values, 'professors,' devoted worshippers of the Western Canon, polishers of busts in museums," for a start. In her zealotry as a new convert in the war against the "White Male Corpse" and in an effort "to repair the broken relationship between Culture and Labor" the Communists had assiduously cultivated, Ugresic decided to write letters to Gucci, Miele, and other companies. In return for featuring their products in her next novel, she wanted suitable compensation. Alas, in 2000, her idea was ahead of its time, or perhaps Fay Weldon and the luxury brand Bulgari simply borrowed it a year later.

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Pessimists are also those likely to try to parse such conveniently vague, all-encompassing terms as globalization. In the essay "Questions to an Answer," Ugresic notes that cultural globalization—or global multiculturalism—has succeeded in reconciling two opposing ideas: universalization and the "unassailable right to inviduality and difference." It has accomplished this by diluting real differences into harmless stereotypes. "Seen from the outside, globalization resembles a rainbow smokescreen through which the face of the Dalai Lama smiles and his voice rings out saying that there can never be enough differently colored flowers." But the real, historical, and sometimes unpalatable differences that underlie these stereotypes remain, despite taboos imposed by political correctness. Ugresic saw those local stereotypes turn virulent when rabid forms of nationalism destroyed Yugoslavia. A false harmony between universalization and individuality is wishful thinking. The tension of this opposition will always remain, and we had better admit it. But, Ugresic concludes, if she has to choose, "Simply on the basis of my traumatic experience of the local, the global gains additional points, as long as we accept this opposition."

She is rueful but unsentimental about the dilemma of Eastern European writers whose cachet disappeared with the Iron Curtain. They have the freedom to write whatever they want, but cannot adapt to the unexpected freedom from literary standards in the Western publishing world: "The greatest shock for an East European writer who turned up in the Western literary marketplace was provoked by the absence of aesthetic criteria." The literary and moral capital they had accrued by sacrificing themselves and risking all for the sake of strenuous criteria of literary evaluation was worthless in the Western markets.

If the displaced and disinherited Eastern European writers could just overcome their allergic reaction to socialist realism, Ugresic suggests, they would have it made. In "Long Live Socialist Realism!" she reminds us that "[if] we just ignore its victims for a moment, then we can say that socialist realism was a happy art": brave, healthy, muscular men and women overcoming disability and hardship, improving society by improving themselves. As the deluge of "How to" books in America shows, we have the same zeal for progress and belief in a brighter future. *How the Steel Was Tempered* has nothing on *How Stella Got Her Groove Back*. (There does not seem to have been a corresponding glut of self-proclaimed idiots and dummies among the socialist realists, however.)

Many of Ugresic's complaints are familiar, and all of them are disheartening, but she states them with elegance and a sense of humor that preempts her wallowing in the cynicism that clearly tempts her. In these essays, she wears her "mask of the East European grumbler" with flair. Eeyore, after all, is the book's presiding spirit. His epigrams introduce the various sections.

Ugresic is as wary of hope for the fate of literature as she is of despair, but there is hope—even for her. One need only turn to her novel *The Museum of Unconditional Surrender* for confirmation that excellent books are not only still being published but, despite the enormous odds against them, are even being published in translation. Written in the early years of her exile, this highly autobiographical novel is a meditation on the themes of memory, nostalgia, and history and how these affect one's sense of identity.

The Museum of Unconditional Surrender is narrated by Bubi, a professor from Zagreb who has fled the dissolution of her country and landed in Berlin. She begins her reminiscences by describing a display case in the Berlin Zoo showing all the indisgestible objects found in the stomach of Roland the walrus when he died on August 21, 1961. The list is long: "a pink cigarette lighter, four ice-lolly sticks (wooden), a metal brooch in the form of a poodle, a beer-bottle opener, . . . a small doll, a beer bottle (Pilsner, half-pint), a box of matches, a

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baby's shoe, a compass," etc. The objects in their fortuitous assortment exert a fascination upon visitors who find themselves compelled to discern the objects' "subtler, secret connections" and historical context. They may note, for example, "that Roland died one week after the Berlin Wall was erected."

And so it is with the flotsam and jetsam of any life, preserved and altered by memory's caprices. This is particularly so for exiles, separated from their pasts by more than just the passage of time. The anecdotes, diary entries, jottings, and stories of the narrator's family and friends that follow reveal "the secret topography" of Bubi's life. But the true subject of the narrator's personal mosaic is slipperiness of identity with its shifting topographies, whether private or public.

Occasionally, in her fiction and in her essays, Ugresic is too facile when creating a literary effect or making a point, but she soon redresses the balance. As she notes in *The Museum*, the "power of banalities lies in the fact that they are for the most part accurate." True enough, but Ugresic is most interesting when exploring their inaccuracies.

Eeyore's words about gaiety and "song-and-dance" should buoy today's debased literary currency: "We can't all, and some of us don't. That's all there is to it." As long as some, like Ugresic, who can write well, do, there will be hope for literature.

Great Scott

Sir Walter Scott
Reliquiæ Trotcosienses.
Edinburgh University Press,
168 pages, $64.00

reviewed by David Grosz

Sir Walter Scott's fall from literary heights to his current obscurity is one of the great nosedives of all time. Major shifts in popular taste and literary criticism tell part of the story, but another compelling explanation comes from a curious footnote of publishing history: the 1826 financial collapse of Edinburgh's Archibald Constable and Co. Dragged into debt along with his publisher, Scott was talked into creating a collection of his Waverly novels, known as the Magnum Opus, which promised to be a cash cow.

The Magnum Opus enabled Scott to pay off his debts and was a publishing milestone—the first collected work of a novelist. But Scott's reputation has suffered for the fact that it has become the standard edition of his work. Although the collection left the texts of the Waverly novels mostly unchanged, Scott surrounded each novel with introductions and annotations—the composition of which represents the author's major literary activity from that point until his death in 1832. While this new material strengthened the theoretical claims of his "historical novels," it obscured and bogged down the epic narratives on which his reputation rested.

Unfortunately, *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses, or, The Gabions of the Late Jonathan Oldbuck Esq. of Monkbarns*, a Scott manuscript nearly completed at the author's death but published now for the first time, will win Scott few new readers. The book was begun in 1830, after Scott suffered the first of three strokes, and its patient and dedicated editors, Gerard Carruthers and Alison Lumsden, readily admit that the manuscript shows signs of the "deterioration of Scott's motor skills and verbal fluency."

A highly idiosyncratic work, which consists of several introductions and a main text that is little more than an annotated tour of Scott's estate at Abbotsford, *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses* almost feels like a Magnum Opus edition stripped of its Waverly novel. It has nothing in common with the typical Scott page-turner. But the book's publication is, one hopes, a sign that a serious scholarly return to Scott is underway, and it serves as a useful reminder of the author's strengths and weaknesses.

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We first met Jonathan Oldbuck in Scott's third novel, *The Antiquary*, which lampoons the practice of antiquarianism. Oldbuck is Scott's most autobiographical character, as well as one of his greatest comic achievements: a goodhearted windbag who manages to charm despite pretentious prolixity and a marked lack of common sense. As an antiquary, he is a sort of amateur historian, philologist, and archeologist, whose satisfaction requires only a library of history books and esoteric artifacts. In one of his sillier moments, Oldbuck insists that a nondescript ditch on his property is a former Roman military camp, though a local mendicant claims to have dug it himself twenty years earlier. He also implores a friend to write an epic poem of Scottish history—just so he can supply annotations.

The Antiquary treats Oldbuck's pretensions with mocking levity. While some of this tone is carried over to *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses*, the manuscript's second half is distinguished by Scott's earnest interest in the text itself. But before coming to Scott's thinly veiled description of his own home and antiquarian collection, the reader must weave through a series of literary smokescreens. The first third of *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses* is made up of three separate prefatory sections—an introduction, proem, and preface—each of which has its own author, none of which has any discernible plot.

The strongest of these introductory sections is the proem. Purportedly written by one of Oldbuck's friends after Oldbuck's death, the proem aims to explain the curious word "gabions" in the book's subtitle. According to Oldbuck's nameless friend, the word first appeared in a poem, written by a member of a seventeenth-century antiquary club, in which "gabions" is used to describe the obscure objects of an antiquary's obsessions: "curiosities of small intrinsic value, whether rare books, antiquities, objects of the fine or of the useful arts." Showering the members of this club with warmhearted condescension, Scott rediscovers in the proem the successful tone of *The Antiquary*.

Following the proem are a brief preface, the only section of the book written by Oldbuck, and the main text, a list of Oldbuck's (actually Scott's) gabions. This catalogue comprises the remainder of the book and includes descriptions of a pulpit used by a secessionist Presbyterian minister, a complete suit of feudal armor, cuirasses from Waterloo, stags' horns, a bust of Shakespeare, and a library filled with obscure volumes. Along the way, the text wanders off on narrative tangents, such as a humorous aside about the danger posed to bibliophiles by libraries with books stacked too high. Yet few of these tangents are memorable, and the text as a whole—written in a convoluted, at times impenetrable prose—is dull and ponderous.

To his credit, Scott seems aware of the limitations of *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses*. The proem concludes by relating a conversation between Oldbuck and yet another friend, who says that he will not involve himself in publishing the catalogue: "I have too much respect for you . . . to be mingled up with an affair from which, believe me, your memory is like to come off halting." This statement reverberates well beyond Scott's own reservations about the text's opaque ruminations. One even senses that the author wrote *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses* to parody his related work for the Magnum Opus.

Despite the success of the proem, *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses* reminds us that description and narrative, rather than authorial self-awareness, esoteric annotation, and metafictional diversion, are Scott's true strengths. In recent years, the Edinburgh Edition of the Waverly Novels has attempted to reintroduce the Waverly novels in their original, pre-Magnum Opus form, and one hopes that a new generation of readers will discover the author's remarkable descriptions of historical battles, deadly storms, and colorful Scottish villages without the distraction of footnotes and authorial asides. While *Reliquiæ Trotcosienses* is not an altogether enjoyable text, it suggests that Scott understood long ago what it has taken

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scholars nearly two hundred years to recognize on their own: Scott the novelist is far more compelling than Scott the antiquarian.

Shorter notices

Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri
Multitude.
Penguin, 427 pages, $27.95

They're back. In 2001, Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri published *Empire*, a long, hermetic neo-Marxist tract hailing the advent of "a new paradigm of power"—"biopower"—that would finally, at last, after all these years, bring about the revolution that Karl and Frederick had promised us lo these many years ago.

The authors were perfect front men for their book. Hardt was a professor of literature at Duke, which meant that he was in the most politicized discipline at one of America's most politicized universities. And Negri, an architect of the Red Brigades, the Italian Marxist-Leninist terrorist group in the late 1970s, was serving a thirteen-year prison sentence in Rome. *The New York Times*, in a long puff piece about the book, speculated that perhaps with Hardt and Negri we had come at last to the "Next Big Idea." My, how the Left loved it. The *Times* opened its op-ed pages to the duo, who assured its readers that "A new species of political activist has been born with a spirit that is reminiscent of the paradoxical idealism of the 1960s." Thank God! This is what we've been waiting for! The book concluded with a paean to "militancy," "revolution," and "the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist."

One might have thought that the events of 9/11 would dampen enthusiasm for this sort of incitement to violence and terrorism. Not a bit of it. For now Hardt and Negri are back with another one-word-titled book: *Multitude*. Really, it is the same book as *Empire*: some of the words are different, but it is the same amalgam of menacing Marxist rhetoric, reader-proof prose, and political fantasy. Hardt and Negri speak stirringly about the advent of "global democracy." So did Chairman Mao. They predict the advent of "new weapons" that will shatter the dominance of "imperial command" (i.e., the United States). Like what? "Consider," they write in the book's concluding passage, "as an experiment with new weapons, the kiss-ins conducted by Queer Nation in which men would kiss men and women women in a public place to shock people who are homophobic. . . . It is not a matter of taking power and commanding the armies but destroying their very possibility." The last time I checked, *Multitude* ranked about 600 at Amazon; doubtless it was selling even better a few weeks ago. What does it tell us that such infantile maunderings are not merely published but taken seriously as political thought?

—*Roger Kimball*

Jean-Paul Sartre
Critique of Dialectical Reason,
translated by Alan Sheridan-Smith,
Forward by Fredric Jameson.
Verso, 836 pages, $25 (paper)

By one of those coincidences that reinforces one's faith in Providence, this new edition of Sartre's most unreadable book appeared on my desk the same day that *Multitude* arrived. Sartre wrote his Marxist apologia at breakneck speed in the late 1950s under the influence of amphetamines. The effort almost killed him. Many readers will rue the adverb.

Sartre's self-appointed task is to explain History from the standpoint of "historical materialism," i.e., what Fredric Jameson rightly describes in his foreword as "orthodox Marxism." Seen from the appropriate perspective, this 836-page Leviathan—Volume One, please note!—is a comic masterpiece—inadvertent, to be sure, and a masterpiece that remains funny only when contemplated from afar, but comic nonetheless. Professor Jameson (like Hardt, a Marxist who teaches at Duke) acknowledges the

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stylistic "difficulty" of Sartre's book but nevertheless compares it to "late Bach." Here's a bit from Sartre's peroration about "the real problem of History." Judge for yourself:

> To comprehend, in an immediate sense, is to grasp the *praxis* of the Other, through its ends and means, as a simple, objective, transcendent (*transcendante*) temporalisation. To comprehend in struggle is to grasp the *praxis* of the Other in immanence, through its own objectivity and in a practical transcendence. I now comprehend the enemy *through myself* and myself *through the enemy*. His *praxis* does not appear as a pure transcendent (*transcendante*) temporalisation which I reproduce without participating in it; urgency forces me to discover my objectivity and adopt it in every detail; it forces me to penetrate, as far as concrete circumstances permit, the activity of the enemy. Comprehension is an immediate fact of reciprocity.

But is it—is comprehension—even an issue when it comes to writing like this? "Late Bach"? Thanks, Professor, but I will stick to "The Art of the Fugue."

—Roger Kimball

Adam Gopnik, editor
Americans in Paris: A Literary Anthology. The Library of America, 656 pages, $40

Perhaps the only trope more tired than the American in Paris is the American writer in Paris. For years, Adam Gopnik, the last expatriate left standing at La Closerie des Lilas, beat his dead horse in the pages of *The New Yorker*. He collected his writings in a book called *Paris to the Moon*. Now there is *Americans in Paris*, a repackaging of American writers from Ben Franklin to Dorothea Tanning, edited by vous-know-who. Here, great writers become a succession of epithets from *Let's Go, Paris!* Abigail Adams is an "urWASP." Thomas Jefferson: "photogenic" and "the model student, the first on a Junior Year Abroad." Henry Wadsworth Longfellow: a "doggerel rhymester." Hemingway, Pound, and Stein: the "Tinker, Evers, and Chance of the American Experience in Paris."

Gopnik is only too self-aware of his own situation: "Paris for Americans is no longer an exclamation point at the end of the world but a question mark at the fringe of our Empire, and if exclamation points provoke poetry, cultural interrogation produces comedy." Rather than joyous escape, in Gopnik's Paris we find didactic lessons. The American occupation after World War II, for instance, becomes an occasion for a homily on the current occupation in Iraq.

The admixture of expatriate posturing and foodie logic makes for creepy results. It was while stateside during 9/11 that Gopnik, in *The New Yorker*, wrote that the pyre of World Trade Center rubble was "Not entirely horrible from a reasonable distance—almost like the smell of smoked mozzarella."

The present volume is not quite so emetic. Nevertheless, it is just as tasteless.

—James Panero

Ludwig Bemelmans Hotel Bemelmans. Overlook, 302 pages, $24.95

Ludwig Bemelmans is best known for his *Madeline* books. But he is also a dazzling writer on the demimonde. Bemelmans was the sort of expatriate who never let reality get in the way of imagination. As a youth he left his home in the Tyrol (after shooting a waiter), boarded a ship for America (believing it full of Indians), and landed in various jobs at the old New York Ritz—the thinly veiled "Hotel Splendide" of these stories. Overlook Press, which is bringing out the collected Wodehouse stateside, has similar plans for this charming writer. Bemelmans crafts a lush world, but his interests are in the kitchen and service areas and the mischief contained therein. Monsieur Victor, Herr Otto Brauhaus, Mr. Sigsag, Lustgarten, and Kalakobé—the Senegalese "casserolier"—fill the menagerie. Bemelmans never approaches that Wodehousian level of storyline or ear for language. But his cosmopolitan innocence and joy for life are second to none.

—James Panero

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Notebook

Kermit Swiler Champa, 1939–2004

by James Panero

No pedagogic considerations are necessary to make us do justice to the great men who led the classic movement. The furious strife between Realism and Classicism is at an end. We have dropped our battle-cries and have learnt to see something more in these people than impersonal professors. They were above all guardians of culture, who worked a kind of cure upon neglected aesthetic instincts. They not only took over an ancient form, renewing and transforming it in a highly original manner; they received and renewed the sense of form itself.
—Julius Meier-Graefe, *Modern Art*

Kermit S. Champa, the Andrea V. Rosenthal Professor of the History of Art and Architecture at Brown University, died on July 22, 2004, age 64. An early contributor to *The New Criterion*, Champa specialized in the history of modernism and nineteenth-century French painting. Believing in the *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or the "absolute aesthetic fullness of art" (in his words), he considered classical music to be intimately tied to modernist form. Lighted water fountains and mysticism found their way into his mix. At Brown, where had been a full professor since 1974, he challenged many students—myself included—with these theories. He also provided a beacon for art historians in the post-formalist flood and a tonic for the trends of the day. All the while, through serious scholarship, he illuminated new ways of looking at great works of art.

Champa himself, intensely private, was often a mystery to others. Champa's wife, Judith Tolnick, and father, Valentino Anthony, have helped me in reconstructing some of his formative development.

In his youth in rural Pennsylvania, Champa made a fateful decision. He sold a beloved collection of Lionel trains and bought a trombone. This trombone found him a place in the high-school band and orchestra of Lancaster. It also earned him a spot as a student conductor. Always a lover of music, Champa became a performer. But he continued to match his performances with listening. He was an early audiophile and kept an interest in audio technology: He delighted in his first record player; he built up a sizable classical music collection; he designed a listening system for a family friend. In high school, he pursued photography, Latin, advanced German, physics, and calculus. Outside of class, he ran his own recording-studio experiments.

At the end of high school, Champa's abilities in math and science earned him acceptance to MIT. He turned down this offer and chose Yale and its Directed Studies program, where he was awarded a scholarship and work-study. It was here, under the influence of Vincent Scully, that Champa determined to study art with the intention of teaching it. He graduated in three years. He traveled to Europe his Freshman year by playing his trombone in the Yale Marching Band.

Visual art became Champa's profession. Music remained his obsession. In the history

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of art department at Harvard University, where he earned his doctorate in 1965, Champa encountered the personalities that have dominated the field of art history up to the present day: Kenworth Moffett, Rosalind Krauss, and Michael Fried among them. His close mentors included Frederick Deknatel and Clement Greenberg—under their guidance, his doctoral dissertation, "The Genesis of Impressionism," became *Studies in Early Impressionism* (1973; 1985), one of his first major books.

From his earliest published work, Champa set about to understand the history of modernism through the influence of classical music. He focused on France in the second half of the nineteenth century. In an essay for *The New Criterion* titled "Renoir in Boston," (December 1985), Champa demonstrated how illuminating this mode of investigation could be—he gave Courbet a similar treatment in *The Rise of Landscape Painting in France* (1991).

In that essay for *New Criterion*, Champa located Renoir within the context of French Wagnerism. He plotted Renoir's itinerary through Wagnerist circles, documenting Renoir's early friendship with the arch-Wagnerist painter Fantin-Latour, his meeting with Wagner in Italy in 1882 (Renoir's subsequent portrait of Wagner illustrated Adolphe Jullien's 1886 study of the composer), and Renoir's plans to attend Bayreuth in 1896. Champa wrote that Renoir's intimate interest in music led him to paint on two levels, "leaving the form serious and the literal content as loose or sentimental as it wants to be." Champa concluded:

> Whether one is convinced of the absolute force of Wagner's example on Renoir's painting, the issue of a musical model in interpreting Renoir's particular achievement seems pressing nonetheless. Certainly no artist before or after made such musical pictures, which is to say pictures that achieve their finish so routinely with a graphic, coloristic cadence and nothing more. In a landscape like *Wargemont* of 1879 (Toledo and shown in Boston) or a figure piece like the *Clown* of 1909 (Paris and shown in Boston), there is an aesthetically consistent ambition to suspend colored form in a confidently abstract, self-sufficient (hence musical) way. The calls of Gautier, Baudelaire, and, finally, Pater for all arts to pursue the expressively free conditions of music fell on no ears more willing to listen than Renoir's—and on no talent better equipped to respond. In Boston, there is, then, much to "hear" as well as to see.

Champa's theories were rooted in form. He also cared about how art was received by a rarified audience. In his article on Renoir, for example, Champa wrote that "for the less cultured viewer, the subject seems sensuously enriched by its luxurious, coloristic ambience. For the cultured viewer, the subject simply names the typology of formal arrangement that the painting begins from, or perhaps ends with."

Such statements set Champa against the grain in the new art history—a discipline that changed radically in the 1970s. Champa was saddened by the turn of events. In *"Masterpiece" Studies* (1994), his most personal book, he wrote: "Sociological, political, and psychological analyses, because of their presumed basis in solid written documentation, have increasingly come to dominate the study of what is arguably the most art-full of all moments in the history of Western painting: the period from the mid-1870s to the mid-1890s in France." For someone who was dedicated to understanding painting on its own terms, Champa could not envision operating without the native tools of his discipline. "With the firm belief that great works of art constitute a very special category of work . . . the present author risks being seen as a politically incorrect intellectual elitist. So be it." In the prologue to *"Masterpiece" Studies*, Champa further explained:

> My truly trendy colleagues . . . find my *Rise [of Landscape Painting]* text, and the present one, insufficiently in step, a judgment, I suspect, colored in no small way by my having written for *The New Criterion*, and perhaps even worse, continuing to read it publicly.

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Champa bore such burdens with style. The rewards of his studies were found throughout his life and work. His lectures, written out longhand on legal pads (due to a malformed hand, he could not type), became some of the more inspiring talks on art one could imagine. At the lectern, this band leader from Lancaster became Courbet in his *Studio* and Wagner at Bayreuth. In 1975, *Esquire* magazine voted Champa one of the ten "sexiest professors in America." He routinely packed the lecture hall at the Philip Johnson bunker, Brown's art building, with students spilling into the aisles. He did not deny the mysteries and essential characteristics of the great works of art. He encouraged many undergraduates to pursue graduate work in art history. When the studies of one of his more promising undergraduates, Andrea V. Rosenthal, were cut short by terrorists in the 1988 bombing of Pan Am flight 103, Andrea's parents endowed a chair in the department. Champa, her advisor, became its recipient.

For his graduate students, Champa was the éminence grise, himself that great work of art: intimidating and private and connective at once. His relationships with students transcended the usual chit-chat (sometimes awkwardly so) and went right to the heart of the matter. Everything you needed to know could be found in Courbet, Meier-Graefe, Baudelaire, and Wagner. Meeting adjourned.

For years Champa disregarded pressures from Brown to develop a more politically correct, identity-based department. Instead, he created an oasis for art history based on a love for form and an abiding interest in the key documents of the discipline. The xerox machine was not the principal tool of scholarship, nor were the latest dispatches from the *Art Bulletin* bound into "course-packs." Rather than Marx, Lacan, Derrida, and Foucault, Champa's primary insights came out of Tchaikovsky, Puccini, Wagner, Mahler, and Richard Strauss. His seminars often began by depositing a number of foxed, multi-volumed hardcovers on the seminar table in a cloud of musty soot: Meier-Graefe, Richard Muther, Théodore Duret, Camille Mauclair, André Fontainas, and Louis Vauxcelles. On another day it might be Roger Fry, Clive Bell, Willard Huntington Wright, Albert Barnes, and Clement Greenberg. His instructions: read, discuss. *Exit* Champa. Certainly, the task was daunting. Graduate students quivered. A stray student typically transferred to another, more sensible class like "Race, Religion and Identity in the Arts of Spain and the Americas." To his own students, however, this was art history that knew no comparison. Champa knew it, too. He began *"Masterpiece" Studies* with this telling quote from Heinrich Wölfflin:

> There is a conception of art history which sees nothing more in art than a "translation of life" (Taine) into pictorial terms, and which attempts to interpret every style as an expression of the prevailing mood of the age. Who would wish to deny that this is a fruitful way of looking at the matter? Yet it takes us only so far—as far, one might say, as the point at which art begins.

For many, art began with Kermit Champa. A Champa Festschrift has been prepared by David Ogawa and Deborah Johnson, former students, for a November release by Peter Lang. A fund exclusively for graduate travel has also been established in Champa's name (for information, contact Gift Accounting, Brown University, Box 1877, Providence, Rhode Island, 02912).

In the months before his death, Champa was re-reading Mme. Blavatsky, Annie Besant, William James, and revising his manuscript on the color music—lights and sounds produced by keyboard—of the English painter and teacher A. Wallace Rimington. I wish he could have lived to publish it, just as I wish I could have seen through my own graduate study with him. I envied those students who were present for his famed seminars. During the course of one, for example, he arranged a séance. For these rich interests, freely shared, everyone adored him.

A memorial service for Kermit Champa will be held at 3:00 p.m. on October 2, 2004, in Sayles Hall, Brown University.

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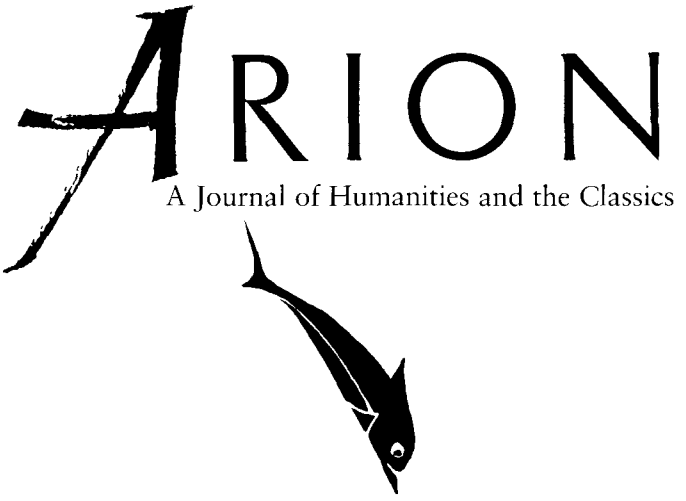

The grand sequence of the classical tradition, which extends in various strands through the Middle Ages and Renaissance to the scientific Enlightenment and modern era, is actually a master paradigm for how to structure an authentically multicultural curriculum on a global scale. All students abroad as well as in the US need to learn the general contours of the world's major artistic and cultural traditions. These long channels of lineage can best be understood as streams—mighty rivers that are fed by tributaries and that are a confluence of mixed and varied material . . .

Camille Paglia, "The Mighty River of Classics"
Arion Volume IX, Number 2.

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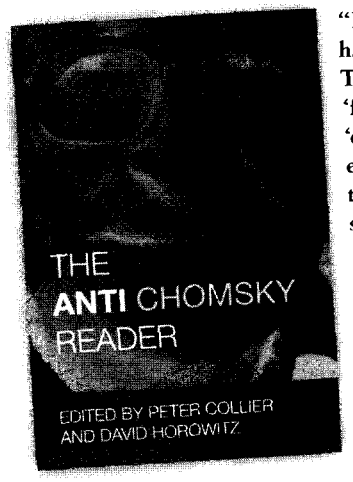

"Finally the smoking gun that conclusively proves what many have long known: that Chomsky simply cannot be trusted. This book documents the reality that Chomsky chronically 'fabricates facts;' 'fakes figures;' 'misquotes authorities;' 'distorts data;' plays 'fast and loose with source material,' and engages in 'blatant professional mendacity.' After reading this book, no one will be able to rely on anything Chomsky says without independently checking every claim."

–Alan Dershowitz

Collier and Horowitz have put together a book that analyzes Chomsky's intellectual career and the evolution of his anti-Americanism. ("About time!" was the reaction of one early reader.) The essays in this provocative book focus on subjects such as Chomsky's bizarre involvement with Holocaust revisionism, his obsessive apologies for Khmer Rouge tyrant Pol Pot, and his claim that U.S. policies since WW II, are comparable to Nazism. Chomsky's linguistics is also subject to second thoughts by some of his leading colleagues. *The Anti-Chomsky Reader* is a fascinating composite portrait of a man whose anti-Americanism has made him a hero abroad and a cult figure at home.

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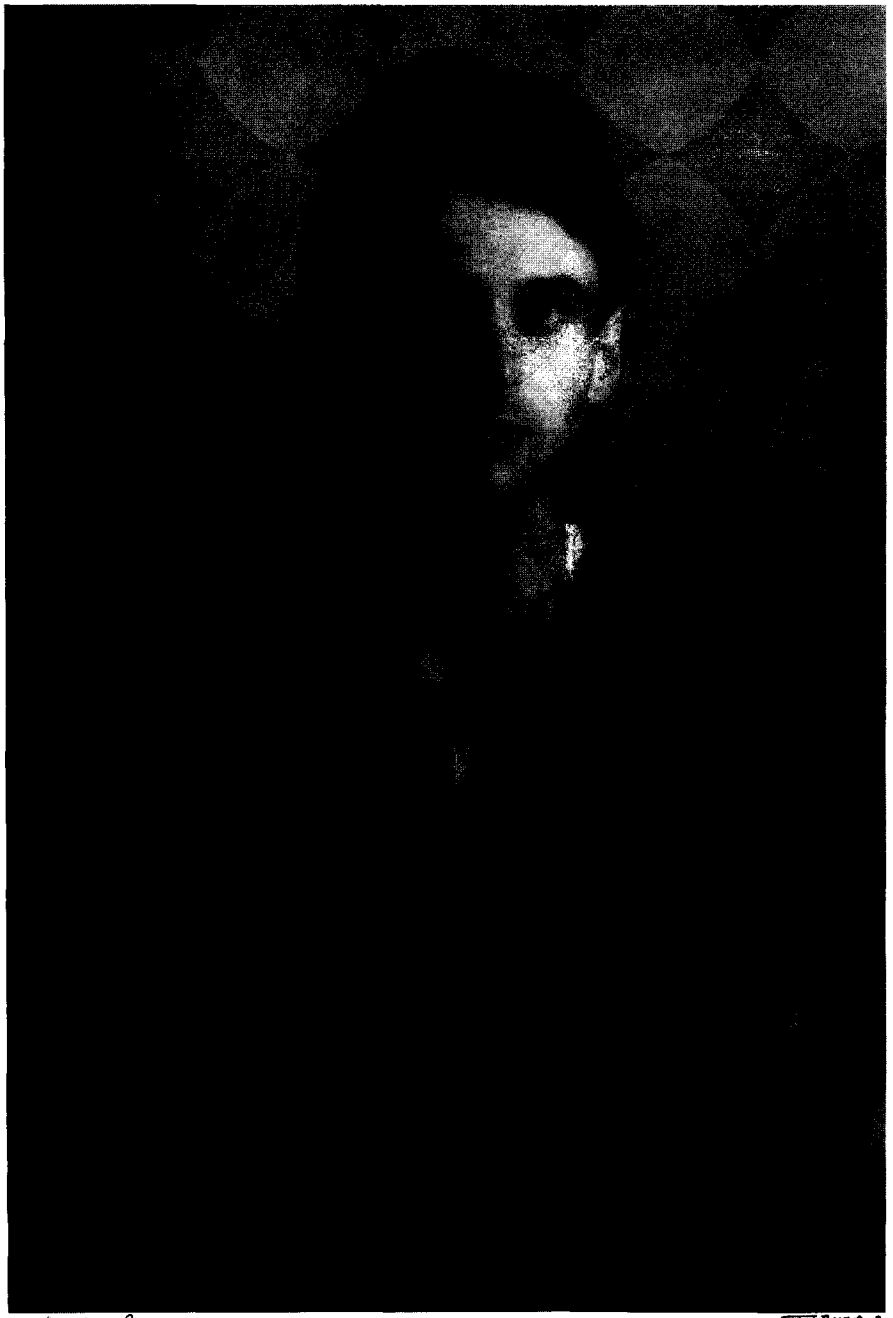

Now that we know that we do not know what it is so necessary for the conduct of life to know, we are at least left with a heightened sense of the importance of 'tendance of the soul'; we shall not, like the rest of mankind, suppose ourselves to be in spiritual health when we are really inwardly diseased; our very knowledge of the gravity of our spiritual malady will make us all the more unremitting in our determination to make the attempt to escape from our ignorance the great business of life. -A.E. Taylor, Plato: The Man And His Work. London. 1926.

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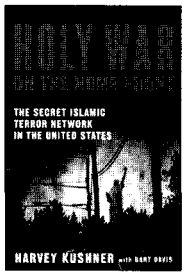

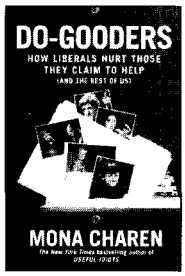

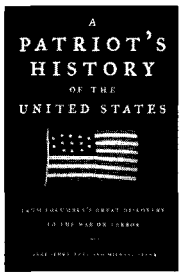

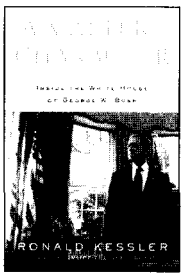

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